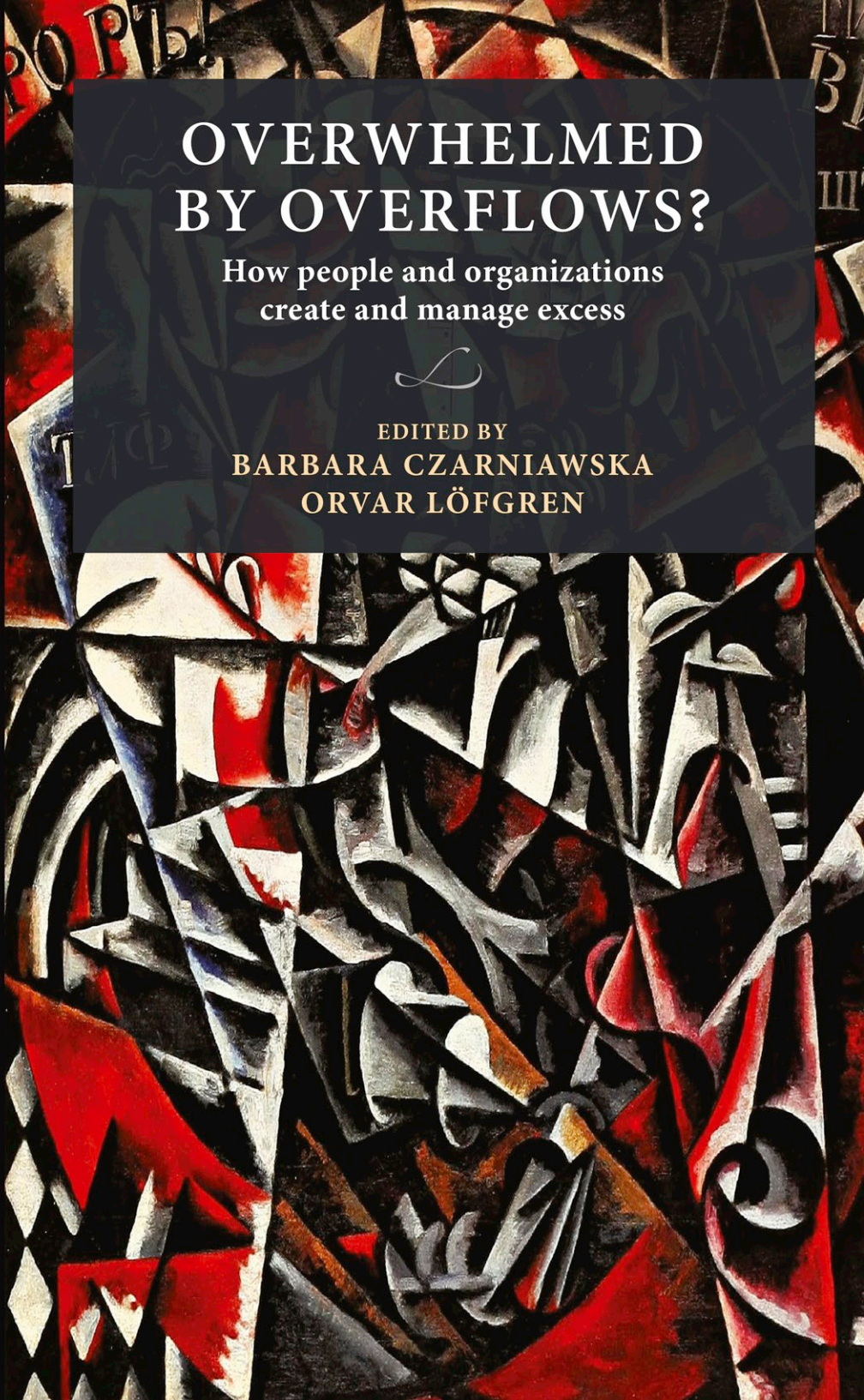

OVERWHELMED BY OVERFLOWS?

How people and organizations create and manage excess

EDITED BY

BARBARA CZARNIAWSKA

ORVAR LÖFGREN

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His latest publications in English include: *Imagining the West in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (editor, 2010); *Sites of convergence: The USSR and Communist Eastern Europe at international fairs abroad and at home* (guest editor, theme issue of the *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2012); *The prince and the savant: Political change and social knowledge in late modern Hungary* (guest editor, theme issue of the journal *East Central Europe*, 2017).

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Introduction

Orvar Löfgren and Barbara Czarniawska

Our times are witnessing intense debates about overflows. Our lives, at home and at work, allegedly create the necessity of living with too much: too many objects, choices, options, activities, and emotions, as well as too much information. Bestseller titles abound, such as *Affluenza: When too much is never enough* (Hamilton and Denniss, 2005), *Distracted: Erosion of attention and the coming dark age* (Jackson, 2008), and *Overwhelmed: Work, love and play when no one has the time* (Schulte, 2014), accompanied by survival guides containing instructions for coping with everyday overload. Dystopic visions of accelerating overflows come together with utopian longings for a more balanced, even minimalist life of order, neatness, and rationality, complete with such antidotes as ideas for achieving 'the smart home' and 'the smart office' – ways of managing overflow with the help of new technologies.

Overflow and its acceleration in everyday life lead to a number of concerns about a wider societal change. How should abundance in domestic consumption and corporate finances be handled? Are social media making life shallower and attention weaker? What about managers' and administrators' complaints about overflows at work making them lose their Panopticon vision and the feeling of control? Time and resources are spent trying to control or cope with overflows in a variety of situations. People have to learn how to handle the steady inflow and outflow of stuff at home, while navigating a rapidly growing landscape of choices ranging from consumer goods and lifestyles to pension schemes and healthcare options. In corporate settings, new managerial solutions are developed to handle blockages and overspill in work processes, caused by things and people alike.

A uniting theme in this debate is 'too much'; but how much is 'too' much? And too much of what? In addition, and perhaps most important: why 'a problematic excess' rather than 'a delightful abundance'? It was such ambiguities and tensions that motivated us to develop a research project on the management of overflow. Situations and sites where flow is seen as turning into a positive or negative overflow offer the opportunity to understand some basic problems and potentialities – both in the lives of individuals and in corporations and public organizations. Surprisingly, there is still a lack of research in this field. (For an overview of earlier research, see Czarniawska and Löfgren, 2012.)

In our project, we looked at the various shapes and forms of overflows, and the different functions they serve. It is a transdisciplinary research project, and its participants have explored a wide range of cases using a variety of field techniques. Our research team included management scholars, ethnologists, and economic historians, permitting us to explore overflows in different social, economic, and historical contexts. Thanks to this varied perspective, we have been able to problematize many taken-for-granted notions of overflow and how it can be handled, and to distinguish general characteristics of overflow management shared in this diversity.

Our first question was: where do we look for overflows? There were several obvious answers to that question: overconsumption, waste and its management, digitalization and news media, administrative practices, and information overload. Gradually, other fields were explored; altogether we examined 31 cases in the three edited books that emerged from the project, and others were published in a special issue of the *European Management Journal* (2017) which we co-edited and which included contributions from researchers outside our project.

This volume summarizes seven years of research, drawing on and adding to the insights presented in the two earlier books from the project. The first volume, *Managing overflow in affluent societies* (Czarniawska and Löfgren, 2012), began by exploring earlier research in the field and then developed a conceptual framework that was put to work in a number of case studies. The second volume, *Coping with excess: How organizations, communities and individuals manage overflows* (Czarniawska and Löfgren, 2013), brought another theme to the foreground: the social and moral dimensions of evaluating overflow in terms of positive or negative, as a problem or as a potentiality. We return to the findings of these earlier publications as we reflect upon the cumulative work over the years.

This has been a fascinating research journey through diverse landscapes and problem areas. Take, for example, the several studies dealing with the home – a place often overcrowded with things, activities, and emotions. There are parents struggling to handle a steady inflow of objects from toys to clothes, developing new strategies for discarding and recycling, while their teenagers are learning the delights of navigating in clouds of music on the Internet – there is never too much of that one! There is the wearied husband accusing his wife of letting her work overload spill over into the home. After all, overflow may be hiding behind a seemingly manageable everyday existence, slowly building up, only to surface in sudden situations or conflicts. 'Look at this flat! We can't continue living like this!'

Another set of studies focused on work settings, an area with a constant need to navigate accelerating flows of information. We have learned about impressive skills for handling overflow developed by certain professionals – from the Istanbul stockbrokers who make split-second decisions about buying and selling, to journalists in news agencies forced to pick a news item out of the 100 available. There are scholars trying to handle and condense immense amounts of research material and university students learning to select or ignore, while scrolling faster and faster through Google lists.

From the start of this project, it was clear that focusing merely on contemporary situations would conceal too many aspects of the phenomenon. From a longer perspective, it is possible to see how overflows come and go and how they are dealt with in disparate ways. How was an overflow defined and experienced in 1880, 1960, and 2017? Our earliest example dealt with a growing extravagance in nineteenth-century French funeral practices.

The historical cases introduced the question of why overflow debates emerge in certain historical contexts and not in others. Recent debates about sustainability have focused on waste – an issue that becomes especially remarkable when one compares its treatment with studies from the 1950s and 1960s, when the focus was on growing or anticipated overconsumption. Such worries took different forms in different parts of Europe. In Western Europe, there was a great deal of moralizing about new consumer habits in the working class, which was entering a world of relative abundance. In Eastern and Central Europe, images of Western consumption created dreams and longings which threatened the political system and forced politicians to develop other strategies for creating controlled abundance.

The historical perspective helped us to understand why the present, rather than the past or the future, is usually seen as the site of problematic overflows. The present may be experienced as chaotic, overloaded, and unmanageable; the past often comes to stand for order, harmony, and a simple, uncluttered life (Bauman, 2007). The future, in turn, if not a dystopia in which nothing can be saved, can be envisioned as the time when rational decisions, planning, and effective management will create a well-ordered utopia.

In the following, we explore three main themes that have emerged during our studies: the interpretative framework or frameworks used in the analysis of the management of overflow; the moral dimensions of overflow; and skills and devices developed to manage or cope with 'too much'.

What's in a word?

The concepts 'excess' and 'abundance' have been subjected to a variety of approaches in public debates and in academic research as such labels are rarely neutral, containing, as they do, hidden overtones or undertones. There is strong metaphorical power in the ways in which 'too much' was and is represented; the two competing research concepts of overload and overflow serve as a good example. *Overload* has held a dominant position for at least a century and is often used when talking in terms of sensory overload or information overload (Lipowski, 1975). A vertical metaphor, it depicts growing pressure – always defined as negative, and often favored by psychologists (see, e.g., Ledzińska and Postek, 2017). We opted for the horizontal metaphor of *overflow*, which is open to a wider range of interpretations. When overflow is judged to be bad, or at least problematic, it can be portrayed as flooding an area or spilling from one area to another, as in the overflow of work into the home – or, less dramatically, it is seen at least as *spillover*. Overflow also attracts other metaphors – for instance *shallowness* – and it can be used to describe a situation in which slow growth, a constant trickle, is suddenly seen as 'too much', because it can no longer be contained. 'We need to deal with this situation urgently!' A sense of emergency arises as overflow is dramatized.

Overflow is defined in dictionaries as the excess or surplus that cannot be accommodated in the space available. This neutral definition permitted us to formulate multiple research questions. Who decides what space is available, and how is this decision made? Who decides what 'accommodate' means, how is this decision made,

and who or what will be doing this accommodation? Who – or maybe what – decides on the excess and surplus, and where does 'just the right amount' end?

All overflow management begins when someone (or something – like software or Artificial Intelligence) diagnoses an occurrence of overflow. But for something to be overflowing, a border, a limit, or a frame must exist (or be put into existence). This is why the notion of *framing*, as used by Michel Callon (1998), has guided our studies: there can be no overflow until some flow has been framed. Framing means defining, and defining permits borders to be imposed. As the economic term 'externalities' suggests, the difference between what is and what is not within the frame can be crucial. Who decides what is in and what is out? How and why? Is it healthcare administrators who define a growing number of patients as a problem, or the patients who think there are too few treatment options? Negotiations, or even battles, may occur over the border's position and how one should deal with overflows created by it.

If an agreement on overflow has been reached (at least within some community or group), the next issue is to decide whether that overflow is good or bad. Ambiguity occurs in both organizational and individual cases. Yes, we are receiving too many orders for the things or services we produce, and it is throttling us, but isn't it proof of our success? Yes, I have too many books already, but this new one on Amazon is absolutely necessary. Yes, checking Facebook every 15 minutes fills my head with too much information, but I may miss something truly important if I don't. Such ambiguity has a tendency to linger, but if it is resolved, different paths will be chosen to deal with the overflow.

If the overflow is considered a good thing, it will be experienced as enjoyable abundance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) or described in other positive terms: the delights of overflow, swimming in it, giving in to it, losing oneself in it. There are many historical examples of a longing for abundance – dreams of cornucopia, Cockaigne, or Schlaraffenland. There are rituals celebrating abundance: various forms of bingeing (Wilk, 2014), for instance, in which frugality or restraint gives way to wild spending sprees. There are festive occasions on which overdoing something signals a break from the everyday and humdrum.

For whom is abundance a problem and for whom is it a boon? What one culture defines as necessity, another may see as excess, and such differences can exist even in the same society among different levels of the social hierarchy. Our studies made it clear

that uses and definitions of a concept such as overflow are culturally charged, and framed by the social and historical context in which they are applied. Consequently, new types of overflows, or even old kinds in new settings, necessitate new or renewed ways of managing them. The very term 'managing', however, has a double meaning in English: controlling and coping. Thus, the ways of dealing with overflow could be divided into learning to live with overflow or learning to control it, depending on the interpretive frame chosen. To define something as an overflow is already a way of controlling it, whereas living with an overflow may turn out to be a way of reproducing or even magnifying it. Do attempts at dealing with overflow generate new competences, routines, and coping strategies – for organizations and for individuals?

The term 'flow' attracts attention to liquidity, and therefore flexibility, which often carries positive connotations. But liquidity can be also associated with other phenomena, such as leaking (Cochoy, 2013), and may provoke discussions about stoppages and blockings, which happen when stuff on the move piles up and creates messes. How do people react when things get out of hand?

A moral economy

Our studies revealed that overflows are primarily reported in certain settings and situations: *experiential*, such as overflows of sensations, emotions, and information (including money, as the diagnosis of overflow is a product of accounting); and *actual*, such as overflows of things, people, and space. The diagnosis obviously has an impact on the ways of managing or coping that will be pursued and the choice of a label to describe the phenomenon. Yet there are similarities to all these manifestations of overflow: the strong moral and emotional charges in the definition of overflows and the ways of handling them. This moral dimension is often linked to a perception of overflow or overload as a problem or a challenge (a euphemism for problems in management-speak), rather than as a possibility or an opportunity. The moral dimension is often found in the politics of overflow, which can be about planners trying to handle fears of future overflows or, at present, the ways of dealing (or not dealing) with the refugees.

So, why is the idea of overflow as enjoyable abundance so rarely encountered in people's reflections and experiences? Some worries about excess and abundance have their roots in 'bourgeois morality' (Ossowska, 1956/1986; McCloskey, 2006), as evidenced in debates

about overconsumption – as lively today as two centuries ago. What differs is the type of consumption that is seen as problematic in a given historical context. In disputes attempting to define the problem, there are often disagreements about what is necessary (essential, required) and what is unnecessary (superfluous, extravagant). A strong class dimension often underlies these debates.

If overconsumption is one strong theme in overflow discussions focusing on commodities and lifestyles, another prominent theme is information overflow. New technologies – from the printing press to the recent world of social media – always seem to produce a new abundance of information. The history of mass media contains many such examples. Encountering new technologies, people first feel overwhelmed or flooded with new possibilities, but sooner or later the difference between the blissful and the stressful will emerge. The ever-accumulating e-mails become a constant worry, whereas abundantly surfing YouTube remains a delight. They may change places in the future, though at present it does not seem likely.

Management skills and devices

The issue of overflow caused by the media introduced another theme to our project: the kinds of strategies, tactics, skills, competences, and devices that people develop to manage overflow. Our examples revealed people learning to manage overflow in varied and sometimes surprising ways. Many of their tools and skills quickly become tacit knowledge, constituting a significant part of everyday practice, yet one that is difficult to transfer and verbalize. Choices are transformed into reflexes; habits nest in the body rather than in the conscious mind.

The net result is an impressive range of ways of coping and managing. There are a great many ways of selecting and de-selecting: categorizing, ranking, bracketing, filtering, and creating new kinds of orders and priorities. Then there is the wide field of routinization, in which overflow is domesticated. There are also many conscious or unconscious ways of ignoring undesirable information. Creativity in this field is truly impressive.

Choices of skills and tools depend on what has to be managed. Coping with too much stuff at home and at work calls for ever-newer techniques and devices for moving, sorting, storing, and discarding. It often amounts to a great deal of body work, with busy hands rather than busy minds. Handling too many activities requires the development of multi-tasking, sequencing, and prioritizing routines. Coping with too much information requires filtering mechanisms

of selecting, ranking, and ignoring. Digitalization has created new tools – a world of algorithms, Google lists, Amazon recommendations, guides for choosing everything from hotels to healthcare; but also personal knacks of scrolling, deleting, skipping, and saving.

Observing the development of these skills and devices helps to provide an understanding of how a threatening or unmanageable overflow can be domesticated into a manageable flow. What was seen as a chaotic and stressful overflow yesterday may become a manageable situation today.

Several key insights can be gleaned from these numerous studies. It is striking that many of the ways of tackling overflow in homes and in formal organizations are conducted ad hoc. People experiment with different tools and approaches, often improvising and re-inventing.

Attempts at managing overflow can also be professionalized and commercialized. A body of consultants has emerged, offering advice to individuals, families, and organizations. There is already a long list of books and pamphlets teaching overflow navigation, which often leads to new types of overflow, creating openings through which problems spill over into a new arena. Thanks to digitalization, for example, service providers and administrators turn the burden of navigating information overflow over to clients and professionals. This is a major transformative process which has accelerated over the last decades.

In the organizational context, it has become obvious that overflow – even of resources – does not always signal success; it may signify losses, leading to professional attempts to build better frames. The strategy of channeling becomes important here, as Franck Cochoy (2013) has noted. Managers should demonstrate that they channel flows – not that they are dealing with overflow, which is proof of failure. Some companies and organizations lose money because of overflows; others make money by devising new methods of framing, redesigning offices, or offering storage facilities. It needs to be added that some managers do understand the relationship between overflow and underflow and attempt to create a balance between the two.

As to individual coping strategies, the notion of *rational ignorance* (Downs, 1957) has become fashionable again in the face of the overflow of information that faces practically everyone (Lessig, 2017[1]). But, as noted in previous volumes, *strategic ignorance* has always been a significant theme. People train themselves in selective hearing,

1 Keynote at the conference 'The Digital Society', Lund, 24 April 2017.

overlooking, turning a blind eye, forgetting, passing over, turning their backs on something, and developing various forms of ignoring what they consider superfluous. It is a fascinating seldom-verbalized learning process, which often remains at an unconscious level, but this does not make it an unorganized activity. People develop rules and routines for neglecting, although this is often couched in passive terms of missing something, forgetting, not noticing, leaving out … To an observer, however, it seems to be a set of relatively coherent tools, developed to fit the setting, be it handling academic literature or stuff at home. In the end, rational ignorance turns out to be the most effective tool in overflow management, but it is a skill that must be acquired via trial and error, and it always needs to be adapted to the problem, the situation, and the preferences of the problem solver. No universal solutions exist.

This book

The three themes presented here are all explored and summarized in the nine chapters of this book. The volume begins with a historical perspective: the worries of the 1950s and 1960s about Western-like consumption overflow. In the first chapter, György Péteri presents the version of this debate as it unfolded in Hungary. How did such a socialist state handle consumer dreams and longings? Did the leaders in the Soviet Bloc perceive these longings as a threat to the system? Apparently, there were a great many consumer desires that the planned economy could not live up to: dreams of a car, a television, a washing machine. Péteri shows how socialist economies turned, at the same time, into economies of storage, in which vast numbers of products never found their way out of the factories, for the simple reason that consumers didn't need or want them. Warehouses were overflowing. This historical sketch acquires additional value in the light of the present (2019) political stance of Hungary.

In Chapter 2, Helene Brembeck moves the issue of overflowing warehouses into another time and place, describing how attempts to manage overflow at home have created a new industry of storage. It is in this landscape of storage, disposal, and waste that Brembeck examined the growing industry of self-storage facilities, which create temporary resting-places for things, slowing down their circulation.

In Chapter 3, Orvar Löfgren tackles the question of an overflow of people in public spaces, by comparing two debates: the debate that occurred when mass travel was institutionalized in the nineteenth century, and the debate surrounding the flow of refugees into Europe

over the past few years, with concerns about navigating in a sea of strangers. How did commercial and state organizations try to control these flows, and what coping skills did travelers need to develop?

Chapter 4 turns to questions of overflows in the workplace. In the history of modern office work, a great many strategies for overflow management have been developed – and discarded. Karolina J. Dudek's field study of a reorganizing company reveals how overflows of people, activities, technologies, and tools are met by the development of new coping strategies. The idea of the activity-based office is currently in fashion; yet, as Dudek says, it follows the classic logic of overflow management: to separate, purify, visualize, and subordinate to strict, new rules.

Chapter 5 remains in the workplace, but the author takes a different approach. Elena Raviola looks at a case of a corporation trying to meet a crisis of overflow and underflow through radical reorganization. Readers are invited to follow a Swedish media group that faced the crisis of print media as it dealt with a severe financial crisis and the threat of bankruptcy. Financial scarcity led to discussions about the type of excess to be battled: too many acquisitions of local newspapers, operating costs that were too high, and employers who deemed their staff to be overpaid.

Chapter 6 considers the issue of overflow in climate research. Jonathan Metzger documented the differences between groups of scholars who define what constitutes valid and robust knowledge for understanding the economic consequences of climate change. How can vast amounts of data be transformed and condensed into models of possible economic outcomes? Just as in Chapter 1, the political aspect is obvious. How are overflows enacted in this scientific debate? What controversies can arise from claims of overflow? And what types of rationale do the conflicting parties invoke?

Sabina Siebert, Robert Insall, and Laura M. Machesky take the theme of overflow in academic research into another arena in Chapter 7. Here the focus is on overflow in biomedical science publishing. Researchers complain that the top-tier journals are overflooded with manuscripts, making it difficult to get published. The authors of this chapter took this issue to journal editors, and a different picture of overflow emerged in their interviews. The editors used the metaphor of a champagne tower, claiming that manuscripts trickle down from high-ranking journals to lower-ranked ones.

The two final chapters address problems of overflow in the public sector, both dealing with attempts at using digitalization as a coping mechanism. In Chapter 8, Lars Norén and Agneta Ranerup examine

the online guides that emerged to help citizens choose among options in three welfare service markets: schools, pension schemes, and healthcare. As greater emphasis on freedom of choice has conquered the public sector, citizens face a rapidly growing number of choice situations. How do guides produced by public authorities compare with competing private ones, and what happens when the old genre of guides is transplanted into new arenas?

Barbara Czarniawska focuses on another transformation of the public sector in Chapter 9: the digitalization of services. At the outset, digital solutions have been seen as an antidote to a growing paper bureaucracy, but it seems that virtual red tape has simply replaced the traditional red tape. Following various attempts to navigate the digital bureaucracy – from applications for maternity leave to visa applications – Czarniawska documents the emergence of new problems. Is virtual red tape better or worse than the traditional kind?

Nine chapters, nine sites, where the puzzling and fascinating phenomenon of overflow is present. The research journey into these cases has led us to conclude that managing overflow is a transformative process, often an attempt to turn the unmanageable into a new type of order. In such reframing, new and creative forms of coping and managing may arise – or not. In his Afterword, Richard Wilk discusses the ways in which various approaches enter dialogues (or quarrels) and points to the potential for further studies of overflow which will allow the unearthing of hidden and surprising connections in everyday life.

1

Consumer and consumerism under state socialism: demand-side abundance and its discontents in Hungary during the long 1960s

György Péteri[1]

Can consumption in state-socialist societies constitute a relevant field for the student of social issues related to overflow situations? So skeptical readers may wonder, and I cannot blame them. Of course, the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about these societies is shortages rather than excesses, insufficiency rather than plenty, a lack of almost everything rather than abundance.

Indeed, shortages and their consequences were a prime subject for Eastern Europe's social scientists of the Cold War era. János Kornai rightly observed in 1978 that the idea of a demand-constrained capitalist v. a resource-constrained socialist economy was almost as old as the state-socialist economic order (Kornai, 1978). As early as 1924, Lev Kritsman noted that 'while the capitalist commodity[-producing] economy is characterized, in general, by excessive supplies, the [typical state of affairs in the] proletarian-natural economy is general shortage' (Kritsman, 1924). Kornai devoted significant effort to theorizing about the phenomenon of sustained shortages in socialist economies. In his *Anti-equilibrium* (Kornai, 1971), a critique of the general (Walrasian) theory of equilibrium, he suggested an alternative framework for thinking about economies in general. His claim was that modern economies were typically non-equilibrium economies; their normal state was either that of 'suction' (sustained shortages of goods and services) or that of 'pressure' (sustained overflow [supply in excess of effective demand] of goods and services). In his *Economics of shortage* (Kornai, 1980), then, Kornai took a major step toward offering a system-related explanation for the reproduction

1 Many thanks to John Connelly, Barbara Czarniawska, and Orvar Löfgren for their useful comments.

of shortage in the socialist economy. The culprit he identified was the *soft budget constraint* within which the producers – the firms owned by the state – operated.

Significantly, and in spite of the fact that Kornai and his younger associates did devote some attention to aspects of household (consumer) behavior under conditions of shortage (Lackó, 1980; Kapitány et al., 1982), Kornai's discussion remained firmly within the world of production. One of his enthusiastic Soviet reviewers, R. G. Karagedov (see Dénes et al., 1987), praised Kornai's work, for it had accorded primacy to production. Iván Szelényi, like a number of other reviewers, welcomed *Shortage*'s focus on production, for Szelényi believed that it enabled the author to discard weak explanatory strategies that related shortages to imperfections in retailing and/or planning. As Szelényi put it:

> Unlike most economists who study the problem of shortage, Kornai moves beyond the sphere of consumption and develops his theory from the analysis of contradictions in the system of production/reproduction. Consequently, he chooses the firm as his basic unit of analysis. With probably too much modesty, Kornai calls his approach 'microeconomic', but of course he uses the firm – as Marx used commodity in the case of the capitalist mode of production – as a 'crystal ball'. By looking into it, one can see and comprehend the complexity of macroprocesses in the socialist economy. (Szelényi, 1985: 285)

But the 'productionist' perspective does precious little to thematize and problematize the consumers' actual role, experience, and practices – even less to analyze how they had to navigate in a social world shaped and structured, among other things, by systemically contingent shortages. Serguei Alex Oushakine (2014) rightly emphasizes that the state-socialist economy could just as well be characterized as an economy of storage – an economy in which a vast number of products never find their way out of factories' or retailers' storage facilities, for the simple reason that no one needs or wants them. From the consumer's perspective, however, it makes little difference that, although their everyday experience was predominantly with quantitative and/or qualitative shortages, 'goods' (good for nothing) were filling warehouses.

Even the idea that the consumer should, by definition, have an agency in the sphere of economic activity seems to have been all too often absent from (or hardly reflected upon in) the writings and ideas of many of Hungary's reform economists.

The consumer citizen of state socialism

Although much less rigorous and meticulous in his economics than Kornai was, György Péter, the doyen of Hungarian reform Communism and reform economics, did seriously consider, as part of his critical assessment of the Stalinist system of economic management, the status of consumers (buyers) and its ramifications in the state-socialist economic and social order.

Péter's reform ideas had been prompted by, enabled by, and grown directly out of the rebellious 1950s – the era of the general crisis of state socialism, as it was known under Stalin. The series of workers' strikes and revolts in Bulgarian Plovdiv and Khaskovo (3 May 1953), in Czechoslovakian Plzen (31 May to 2 June 1953), and in East Berlin (17 June 1953) touched a nerve with the Moscow leadership. As Beria gave Malenkov to understand, 'what happened in Czechoslovakia could be repeated in other countries and lead to more serious undesirable consequences' (Osterman, 2001: 15ff). In a series of meetings, Moscow issued emphatic recommendations that East Central Europe's Communist leaders reorient their policies in the direction of a new relationship between rulers and the ruled, including the relaxation of terror and oppression and the abandonment of the investment mania prioritizing the development of heavy industry at the expense of consumption, living standards, and agriculture. New Course policies received a badly needed push forward in Hungary by the direct intervention of the Moscow leadership in major personnel decisions: in the course of the Hungarian leaders' visit to Moscow, 13–16 June 1953, they decided that Imre Nagy, sidelined by Mátyás Rákosi in 1949, should assume the position of Prime Minister. Although Rákosi and his hardline followers put up a fight, with temporary success in 1955, New Course policies held sway from that point on, preparing the ground for the reform policies of the 1960s.

As President of the Central Statistical Office, György Péter contributed substantially to an increasingly critical assessment of the Stalinist system of macro- and micro-economic management in a long series of highly classified papers in the early 1950s (Péteri, 1993). He went public with a devastating indictment of this economic order for the first time in a 'debate article' in the newly (re)launched *Közgazdasági Szemle* (*Economic Review*) in December 1954 (Péter, 1954). There has been a fair number of publications on Péter's essays of the 1950s and later, and on his contributions to the ideas underlying the economic reforms and reform economics of the 1960s

(Szamuely, 1986; Árvay et al., 1994). What I focus on here is what he wrote about the consumer. Péter thought it important to take a step beyond what was soon to become the 'standard list' of critical complaints against the Stalinist system of economic management: the arguments against excessive centralization in decision-making; the overwhelming predominance of bureaucratic coordination of all economic transactions; and, in general, the suppression of the 'law of value' (i.e., of market coordination) in economic activity.

Péter called the attention of his readers to the empirical observation that when Hungarian industries exported their products, they had a difficult time getting away with poor selection, substandard quality, and/or high costs and prices (which explains why, especially in the post-1956 world, the term *exportból visszamaradt* (remainder of export goods) meant high, 'Western'-quality consumer goods and pretty good luck for the shoppers who could get them). By contrast, he wrote:

> Domestic consumers are weak to assert their demands. This is the main reason for the sub-standard quality and poor selection of goods and for the disappointing development of production costs […] *The workers – consumers – can hardly ever choose; they have no leverage [over the producers], for the supply of goods is poor even in terms of quantities*. Part of the consumption goods can seldom be acquired and at the cost of great effort. […] Under such circumstances *the consumer is at the mercy of the retailers and, eventually, of the industrial companies producing the consumer goods*; s/he is forced to make do with goods of inferior quality, offered at high prices. (Péter, 1954: 309–310; italics added)[2]

Thus, Péter's argument was that a functioning market was necessary, not for its own sake, but for the emancipation of the consumer – indeed, for the creation of the autonomous consumer citizen:

> To ensure that the work of producer companies could indeed be controlled by those affected (the consumers or, in general, the buyers), it is necessary that those whose […] needs are satisfied by production should not be exposed to those who are supposed to serve them. (ibid)

And he hastened to add:

> One of the main preconditions for setting the relationship between producers and consumers (sellers and buyers) right is to have, in the

2 All translations from Hungarian in this chapter are by the author. All primary sources are listed at the end of the chapter.

> sought-after quality and selection, *the appropriate amount of consumer goods in demand* […] Whether the quality of the consumer goods […] is as it should be can only be decided by consumers […] The satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the consumers […] with regard to quality and selection, on the other hand, can assert itself institutionally only if they can freely decide whether they [wish to] buy the goods offered or which product out of a selection of similar goods they want to buy. (Péter, 1954: 310–312, italics added)

Thus, in the early ideas of economic reforms, the autonomous consumer-acquiring agency in a new system of socialist economic order that combined planning and market with the generation of a sustained glut of goods (supply in excess of effective demand) went hand in hand with, and were premised on, each other. The move toward market socialism, the (re-)emergence of the emancipated consumer free to make choices, and a sustained supply-side abundance were thus but three sides of the same coin – and they remained at the core of the reform-Communist economic credo all the way to the final demise of the state-socialist project. The autonomous consumer as an organic part of the ideal economic world envisioned by reform Communists was confirmed by, among others, the chief architect of economic reforms, Rezső Nyers himself. At a meeting with board members of the Hungarian Alliance of Technological and Scientific Associations (MTESZ), Nyers responded to a question about insufficient imports of private cars by saying:

> It might easily happen that life will sideline our plans and there will be a faster development. The general experience is that the will of the consumer supersedes the plans of the state. We have to yield to and follow the consumer. (Document 1, 1970)

The demise of state socialism in 1989 has, of course, a highly complex explanation and cannot be reduced merely to the failure of reform-Communist policies. Even so, it is important to observe that the changes occurring over the course of the 1960s did include the birth of the consumer citizen and some half-hearted steps toward an economic domain in which planning *and* market are integrated. The 'New Economic Mechanism' never succeeded in generating supply-side abundance, however.

The advent of consumerism and demand-side abundance

What, in fact, the long decade following 1956 brought with it was *consumerism*. Consumerism defined as values and desires, patterns of behavior focused on satisfying an acquisitive lust that defines,

as it were, the meaning of life (Bauman, 2007: 26ff) does not presuppose the presence of abundance as it is known from contemporary Western affluent or consumer societies.

Although it can be of genuine interest to study the various normative (ideological and/or political) attempts to tame, restrict, and/or harness consumerism under socialism, these attempts in no way justify talk of 'socialist consumerism' among students of state socialism. After the revolutionary experiment geared to building up an authentic socialist everyday life from below in Soviet Russia of the 1920s, and the short-lived Khrushchevian experiment at the end of the 1950s and early 1960s which purported to modernize Soviet everyday life from above, the history of state socialism in the 1960s and later was a history of a more or less planned and deliberate withdrawal from the earlier ideas of creating a 'socialist lifestyle' or the 'Socialist Man' (*Homo Sovieticus*) and of a gradual surrender to the forces of consumerism.

If the reader wonders why, in terms of lifestyle, the project of a state-socialist *Sonderweg* was given up and Western patterns were yielded to, I can list several closely interrelated and partly overlapping explanations:

(1) By the end of the 1950s, the peoples of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were tired of promises and especially of demands to subject their everyday (private) lives to solutions that were deemed systemically correct but consistently failed to deliver a better life. Following the rebellious 1950s, Communist leaders seemed to have understood the urgent need to deliver higher living standards and to upgrade issues pertinent to consumption on their agenda.

(2) What I term 'the rebellious 1950s' was particularly traumatic for the Communist leadership in Hungary. Kádár's counterrevolutionary consolidation had a crowded agenda, even without such ambitious projects as a 'socialist everyday life' would have entailed. After the Red Terror (actually, even while the terror was ongoing), they needed to pacify Hungarian society by way of: (a) proving themselves to be genuinely anti-Stalinist in all policy fields (excepting, of course, the political monopoly of the party); (b) retreating from people's private lives; and (c) accepting that people seek improvements in their living conditions and enabling them to do so, preferably in proportion to their work effort. It was no longer sinful, much less criminal, to seek to achieve what was considered a 'good life', and there was also an ever-expanding domain of lifestyle choices that were accepted or at least tolerated, if not necessarily or openly supported. This was also part of the meaning of Kádár's famous saying, paraphrased as 'those not against us are with us' (Rainer,

2001), directed as much toward Hungarian society as toward his own party's left-wingers with Stalinist nostalgias. The necessity of breaking with the Stalinist political and social order alongside the idea of telling people how to live, and what should make them happy, simply could not constitute a feasible combination for the Kádárist leadership (Simon, 2012).

(3) In October 1966, Kurt Hager, the cultural chief of the Communist Party of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), tried to impress upon his visiting Hungarian comrades that the ongoing 'propaganda' from West Germany and, above all else, the pull of West German soft power, the demonstration of the living standard and lifestyle of West German citizens, could lead to 'a war in the German lands not unlike the one in Vietnam'. He urged his Hungarian counterparts to understand that the situation of the East German cultural-political leadership was like sitting on top of an active volcano (Document 2, 1966). Document 2 does not reveal how the Hungarian high party functionaries reacted to Hager's complaint, but it can hardly be far from the truth to guess that they might have said something along the following lines: 'While, admittedly, the GDR may be closest to the hot lava and gases, we are all sitting on the top of that same volcano.' The pull of the West asserted itself through the growth of inter-systemic tourism and, just as important, by way of the increasing exchange of cultural products across the systemic divide. For example, within the totality of foreign television programs (e.g., feature films and documentaries) broadcast on Hungarian television, those originating from capitalist countries grew from 33.7% to 57.6% between 1962 and 1968, and although their relative share dropped to somewhat under 50% in the 1970s, their quantity as measured in minutes continued to grow, as did the number of channels and the total television broadcasting time over the years (Document 3, n.d.).

After all, norms, values, and lifestyles reflective of them travel across national and even systemic boundaries, which is why I suggested using the metaphor of 'Nylon Curtain' (Péteri, 2004) more than a decade ago. The Kádárist leadership was keenly aware of the soft power without, including the demonstration effects coming from the West. Indeed, this was a major argument propelling the economic reforms of the 1960s. As Rezső Nyers told his colleagues in the Political Bureau in 1966:

> What can we expect from the reform? More than just a few percentage points of improvement. The alternative is that our economy will not

> get the necessary investments, because we cannot find the resources, and that the population will not be satisfied. […] *If we decided against the reform, we could actually continue working with these internal contradictions, had not there been such a desire in our people concerning its living standards, had not there been capitalist competition* […] What I want to say is that there is no choice. If we really look at things in depth, there is no opportunity to choose; we can only choose that this [reform] has to be done. (Document 4, 1966; italics added)

Then came the economic reforms of the 1960s, expanding market coordination at the expense of bureaucratic coordination and tying individual incomes not merely to 'work effort' but to the profitability of one's enterprise, further promoting the adoption of Western patterns of everyday life.

(4) The middle classes of state socialism – by and large co-extensive with what we could rightly describe as the party-state apparatus class – acted as the prime social force yielding to and 'importing' Western consumerist notions of the good life, as I have shown with regard to the breakthrough of private automobilism in the 1960s (Péteri, 2011).

(5) Last but not least, the political class of Kádár's counterrevolution badly needed to achieve a new contract with Hungarian society, Kádárism's fundamental tradeoff between individual prosperity (or the chances to achieve prosperity) and political citizenship. Having crushed the revolution and having delivered a particularly cruel and bloody vengeance, János Kádár's counterrevolutionary regime had to achieve a new understanding with society – a social contract yielding improved legitimacy while leaving the political monopoly of the Communist Party intact. But the new social contract could be attained only at a price: the Communist Party and its central planners had to back out of people's private lives, leave it up to them to decide what a 'good life' constituted for them, and, in general, abstain from interfering with their choices concerning their dreams and desires, their lifestyle and consumption.

Of course, the tradeoff between political citizenship and the role of the consumer citizen was only seemingly a free choice for Hungarian society. Yet, it did work, which is well reflected in contemporary designations for the emerging reform-Communist social order describing the result of the compromise as 'gulyás socialism' or 'the happiest barrack in the camp'.

It needs to be emphasized that these and/or similar developments did not turn any of Eastern Europe's state-socialist countries into

'consumer societies'. The consumer society as it emerged in North America and Western Europe after the Second World War was characterized by a sustained buyer's market (the situation that György Péter and reform economists of the 1960s wished to achieve). The typical situation in these economies and societies is *supply-side abundance*: a systemically contingent overflow of goods and services produced and offered in excess of effective demand. By contrast, and despite the reforms of the 1960s and the 1980s, state socialism remained a centrally planned economy which was never really free from strong state paternalism, the consequent soft budget constraint, and the propensity to produce and reproduce shortages. The typical situation here was *demand-side abundance*: an overflow both in terms of effective demand and in terms of consumer dreams – a combination of unleashed consumerism (desires and acquisitive lust) and shortages.

Attentive minds were quick to recognize the potential or actual tensions generated in Hungarian society by demand-side abundance. Among the earliest signals was the leftist populist writer Pál Szabó's 'Literary letter' from 1960. Szabó sensed where Hungarian society had been heading and thought it could easily prove to be an alley that one did not want to go down:

> The socialist world order has hardly provided a sample of everything that is possible and might become reality, and we can already see that, obviously, material welfare in itself educates the urban population as well as the provincial masses […] to become bourgeois rather than socialists. (Szabó, 1960: 4)

The debate on *fridzsider szocializmus* (refrigerator socialism) (Pótó, 1986; Horváth, 2008) in the early 1960s was only the beginning of a series of regular outbursts against 'petit bourgeois' attitudes and behavior throughout the Kádár era.

Far from being confined to Hungary within the 'Eastern Bloc' (Vihavainen and Bogdanova, 2016), the coming of consumerism and its consolidation can be traced and shown in the mirror of its critical reception by several shades of Kádár-era Hungary's cultural and intellectual life. In the rest of this chapter, I present and discuss only two distinct streams of critical reception of the advent of consumerism and demand-side abundance in Communist Hungary. First, I present the contemporary satirical mirror held to advances of consumerism in Hungarian society by the cartoons published in the weekly satirical magazine, *Ludas Matyi*, in the first seven years of János Kádár's counterrevolutionary regime (1957–1964). I then

discuss the reception of demand-side abundance through the critical sociology of András Hegedüs and Mária Márkus.

Consumers for export?

Ludas Matyi was a satirical weekly published throughout the postwar and Cold War eras (1945–1992). In the years after 1956, it was edited and published in offices neighboring those of the Communist Party daily, *Népszabadság*. Similar to its 'sibling' magazines in the other state-socialist countries (such as the Soviet *Krokodil*, the Czechoslovak *Dikobraz*, GDR's *Till Eulenspiegel*, the Polish *Szpilki*, or the Bulgarian *Starshel*), it worked as the party's weekly. Institutionally, its editorial office formed part of a Central Committee department, together with *Népszabadság* – under the control of the party apparatus, of course. This inevitably implied that many areas of social-political life were off limits to *Ludas*'s satirical commentaries; one could not make fun of individual leaders of the party-state, for instance. Yet, the magazine enjoyed considerable popularity, as readers scrambled for copies of every issue sold by the street vendors. In spite of the extraordinarily high number of copies printed, it was difficult to obtain a copy by late afternoon of the day a new issue appeared.

The popularity of the magazine, which always carried considerably more cartoons than text, can hardly have been a function of the messages it conveyed from the Agitation-and-Propaganda apparatus. Besides the unavoidable politically correct material, the magazine carried many of the cartoonists' own commentaries on the contemporary world that were not necessarily sanctioned by party authorities. Indeed, as I emphasized in an earlier essay about this magazine (Péteri, 2009), if their bantering satire was to be efficient, the *Ludas* cartoons had to resonate with their readers' experiences in their actual life-world, and that is exactly the reason why the magazine was so popular.

Few better contemporary illustrations could be found for what demand-side abundance is about than the cover page of the 21 April 1960 issue of *Ludas Matyi* (Figure 1.1).

It carries one of Sándor Gerő's cartoons (Gerő, 1960a) featuring, in the background, the entrance and exit of a department store. In the foreground, we see an impressive US car and three men. Two of the three are in a dialogue with one another – a US businessman, 'Mister Williams', and a Hungarian official (perhaps from the Ministry of Foreign Trade, assigned to accompany Mr. Williams). The third

Figure 1.1 Sándor Gerö, cover of *Ludas Matyi*, 21 April 1960

man, probably Mr. Williams's companion, looks on with goggling eyes, as if unsettled by the scene unfolding in front of them: people streaming into the department store with little expression on their faces, and the masses streaming out, many of them smiling and happy. Clinging to their purchases, they leave the store in a state

of bliss. Significantly, with the exception of a few, we cannot quite see exactly what they have managed to buy. Many of the objects they hold are invisible – nondescript packages wrapped with string. What does emphatically transpire from the cartoon, however, is the joy that acquisition has brought them. The contrast between the faces of those entering and those exiting tells of an almost religious, transcendental experience in that department store. Mr. Williams understood all too well what he just saw – it was demand-side abundance – and when his Hungarian negotiating partner asked him 'From a commercial point of view, what are you interested in, Mr. Williams?' the answer was instantaneous: 'A number of things. For example, would you consider exporting consumers too?'

The feeding frenzy evoked the American businessmen's awe and envy. Coming from the USA, the archetype of Western consumerist civilization, they were shocked to find consumers in a Communist country more eager than their own consumers back home. David Riesman would not have been surprised, as is clearly shown in his amazing and amusing thought experiment, 'The nylon war'. In this piece of scholarly fiction from 1951 (Riesman, 1993: 67–79), he suggested that the Cold War could be finished off with an 'all-out bombing of the Soviet Union with consumers' goods'; 'if allowed to sample the riches of America, the Russian people would not long tolerate masters who gave them tanks and spies instead of vacuum cleaners and beauty parlors.'

It needs to be emphasized that Gerő's cartoon and most of the others criticizing the consumerism that was more and more in evidence in Hungarian society had an ambiguous rather than univocal relationship with what the citizens had seen and commented upon. Hungarians did not seem to mind that many people were better off and could afford to indulge in 'the pleasures of shopping'. They unambiguously condemned the malfunctions of state-socialist retailing, however: the exploitation by producers (and retailers) of their monopoly position and, in general, the weak and exposed position of consumers. Many cartoons commented on the negative effects of shortages: the need to stand in lines, the corruption (the need to pay considerable 'tips' to shop assistants in order to get commodities in great demand), and/or the lack of interest on the part of retailers and producers in pleasing the consumer (see, e.g., Gerő 1957; Réber 1957a; 1957b; 1957c; Szűr-Szabó 1957a; Toncz 1957; Várnai 1957; Vasvári 1957; Mészáros 1967).

One can also sense a feeling of relief that the 'ascetic' Rákosi era had been left behind, as Tibor Kaján's quip illuminates rather

well. His cartoon 'At the lottery of Peace Bonds' (Kaján, 1957) requires some explanation. In accordance with the Soviet (Stalinist) 'model', working people were expected to devote part of their incomes to buying so-called Peace Bonds in Hungary. These were state obligations, and their point was to force the population to save a chunk of their meager salaries and wages to promote the objectives of the Stalinist accumulation mania (increasing the share in the national income of investments at the expense of consumption). Failing to subscribe regularly to the Peace Bonds was considered a hostile act and could have dire consequences. After 1956, no new Peace Bonds were issued, but their amortization took longer – well into the 1960s. The debt of the state was settled in part by a lottery, whereby the lucky owner of a bond with the number that came up could receive more than the original price of the bond. Kaján's cartoon shows one of these Peace-Bond lottery draws, wherein one man waiting for the results says to another: 'If I win, I am happy because I won, if I don't win, I am happy, because I no longer need to subscribe to new bonds.'

Nevertheless, the cartoonists also seemed to believe that consumerism brought worrisome tendencies along with it. In general, they were concerned about the perversion of human values: the disproportionate significance that *things* would assume in people's lives – people's fixation with goods in general and with certain 'iconic objects' of consumer desire in particular (fetishism). In Russian (Soviet) parlance, this was called *veshchism*, which had the connotations of 'materialism', 'consumerism', or 'excessive devotion to material objects' (Vihavainen and Bogdanova, 2016: xix, 17, 70, 170). Perverted hierarchies of preferences were found to be disturbing too – hierarchies that manifested themselves by people proving ready to deny themselves and their families the most elementary needs in order to acquire or carefully maintain a precious object, such as a private car.

As objects of desire started filling the shop windows, the lust to acquire them grew, as shown by Tibor Kaján's cartoon, 'Humans are steered by their desires' (Kaján, 1959). The desire and will to acquire things, the ownership of which seemed to become the norm and the necessary means to project, establish, or reproduce social status, appeared to be a ubiquitous tendency. In another of Tibor Kaján's cartoons (Figure 1.2), a husband and wife are sweating, while literally prying out of Fortune's cornucopia the prime objects of consumer desire: a refrigerator, washing machine, television set

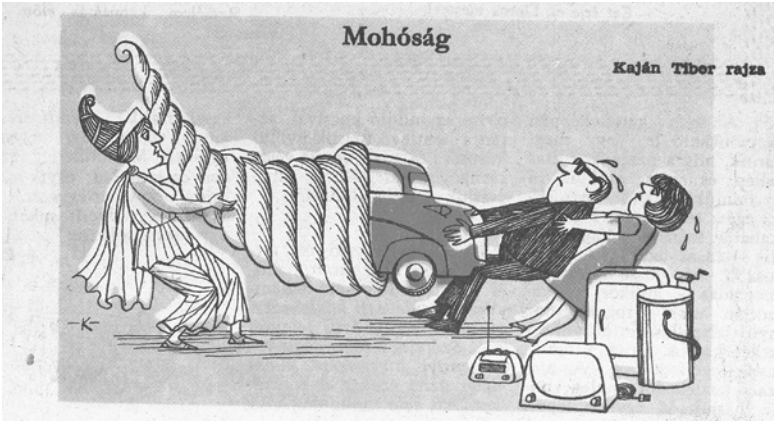

Figure 1.2 Tibor Kaján, 'Mohóság' ['Voracity'], *Ludas Matyi*, 16 May 1963

and finally, the crown on a consuming life, the private car (Kaján, 1963a).

As another Kaján (1963b) cartoon suggests, the new consumerist era's hero worship places on a pedestal the person who has succeeded in getting it all. With the posture of a proud general after a battle won, the hero stands on top of his major acquisitions – the car, the refrigerator, the television set, and a washing machine – and the monument is surrounded by worshippers standing in awe, with hats off, to pay their respects. No doubt they are trying to prove good disciples of their source of inspiration.

Radically changing norms and values were the focus of István Hegedűs's (1964) 'Family album'. He showed how, in two generations, love for and pride in one's children and grandchildren is replaced by love for and pride in the acquisitions of a modern married couple who live on their own, have no children, but are the happy owners of a car, a vacuum-cleaner, a washing machine, a television set, and a magnetophone (reel-to-reel recorder). A similar commentary on the growth of an acquisitive society is László Réber's (1958) work, although the family in this case included children.

Resonating with these cartoons was what grew through the 1960s to become a standard topos or at least something like a genre of its own: bantering the '*kicsi vagy kocsi*' dilemma, 'Shall we get a baby or a car?' (Péteri, 2009: 10–11). No doubt the popularity of

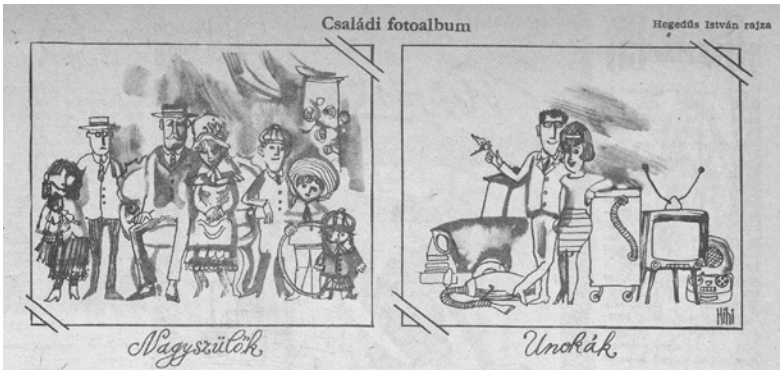

Figure 1.3 István Hegedűs, 'Családi fotoalbum' ['Family album'], *Ludas Matyi,* 5 March 1964

this topos among cartoonists was the particular force with which it revealed how demand-side abundance drove people to negotiate (and oppress) their most natural and traditional needs and values (such as love, making children, and the cultivation of familial ties), for the benefit of satisfying their acquisitive lust.

Hegedűs was among the first to notice the paradoxical phenomenon that 'gadgets of the day' would make their way into Hungarian households, in some cases long before all other basic needs had been taken care of. In his acerbic comment on the new, consumerist understanding of the concept of 'Civilization' (Figure 1.4; Hegedűs, 1957), we see a shanty town of dwellings improvised out of whatever materials happened to be at hand – they have no running water and the roofs can hardly withstand the weather, but all are adorned with a TV antenna.

Indeed, the second half of the 1950s and early 1960s saw a sudden mushrooming of one of the main objects of desire: television. Having a TV became a matter of social status and reputation (one of the defining phenomena attendant to consumerism), as reported also by József Szűr-Szabó in a cartoon in which father and son, putting the finishing touches on the newly built family house, erect an antenna on the roof, saying, 'The neighbors will go cuckoo with envy […] believing that we even have a TV-set' (Szűr-Szabó, 1957b). Another work of Szűr-Szabó addresses the same issue, using the Leninist concept of 'uneven development' as the title of the cartoon. It depicts a couple inhabiting a minimalist house; although they own all that belongs to a 'modern household', they are forced to

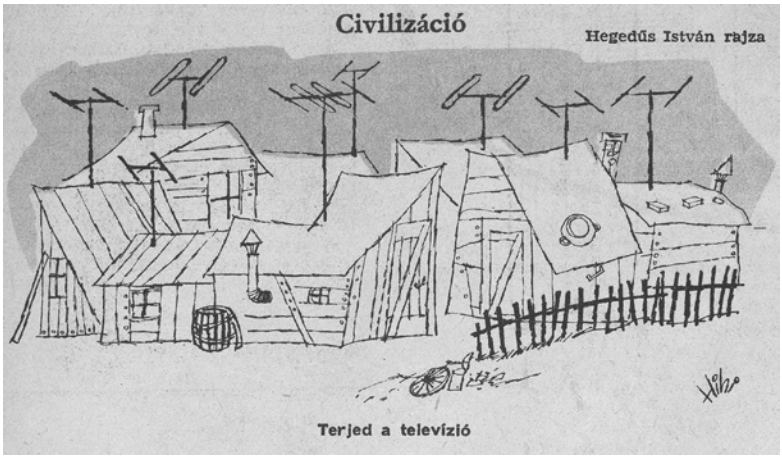

Figure 1.4 István Hegedűs, 'Civilizáció' ['Civilization'], *Ludas Matyi*, 9 May 1957

place their television set, washing machine, and refrigerator outside for lack of space within (Szűr-Szabó, 1959a).

Trips abroad were one of the typical situations in which the consumer, driven by the passion to acquire, was caught and revealed. Such travels enabled the consumer to acquire things unavailable at home, or not available in a broad enough selection or qualities or prices. Smuggling, selling, and buying goods abroad hence all came to be present in the course of visits to other socialist countries or to the West, as the András Mészáros cartoon 'Hungarian tourists abroad' registered: of a large group of tourists, only one, named Kerekes, seems to be interested in the impressive sights offered by the place visited. The others are buying and selling and exchanging cameras, watches, salami, and underwear. One of these peddlers tells the other, 'I don't understand this Kerekes – why on earth would he come abroad to waste his whole day on sight-seeing?' (Mészáros, 1958). Lucky were those who could travel more often and with a *per diem* in their pockets, thanks to their jobs. Tibor Toncz's work (Figure 1.5) shows one of these happy travelers, explaining to his compatriot why he is sleeping under the bridge: 'You know, I am still saving for a magnetophone and a small car!' (Toncz, 1958b).

Assignments abroad of more than a few weeks (especially in the West) might even have enabled the purchase of a car. A review of

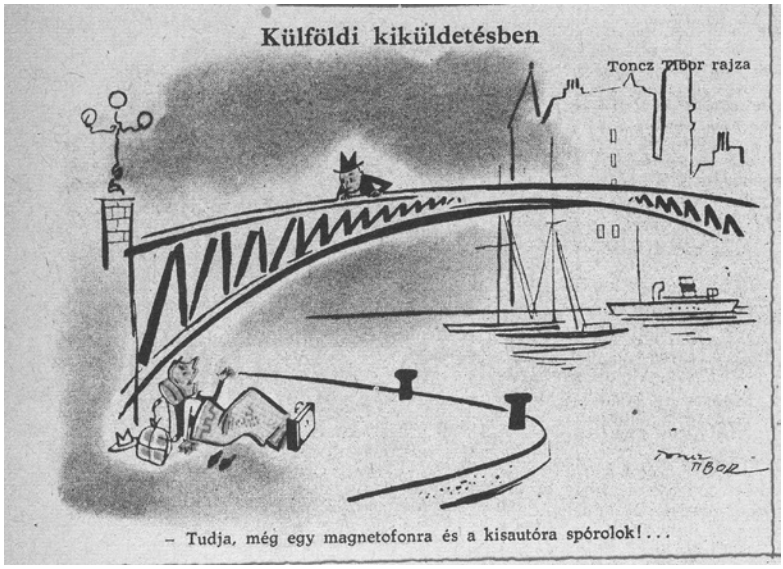

Figure 1.5 Tibor Toncz, 'Külföldi kiküldetésben' ['On assignment abroad'], *Ludas Matyi*, 12 June 1958

the 'Problems attendant to Hungarian–US cultural relations' by the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1966 bitterly reports that among Hungarian scholars receiving Ford Fellowships, only a minority used their stipends to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the USA or to acquire scientific literature and equipment. Most set aside even the grant earmarked for purchasing books to buy a car. '[With the same objective in mind,] some of them save to an extent that is detrimental to proper nutrition' (Document 5, 1966) – i.e., they don't eat enough and they eat junk food.

Just as the consumerist world presents a hierarchy of goods, so the wide world offers a hierarchy of places arranged by shopping opportunities, the high point of which, understandably, was the West. Joking about 'adoration of the West' (*Nyugat-imádat*), therefore, became one of the favorite occupations of the *Ludas* cartoonists. Gizi Szegő showed a clumsy waiter emptying the contents of a bowl of red (sour cherry?) soup into the lap of an elegant lady. As she is leaving the posh restaurant with plenty of red spots on her dress, another woman, passing by, remarks: 'What a beautiful pattern! No doubt, it must be from Paris' (Szegő, 1959). Tibor Toncz depicted a husband arriving from the West and disembarking from the train.

He has a red nose and a handkerchief at the ready. His wife, waiting for him on the platform, asks, 'Have you caught the flu?' To which he responds with a proud and triumphant smile, 'Not only that, but an original Western one!' (Toncz, 1960) The same strings are touched by Sándor Erdei's cartoon, in which a Hungarian tourist couple stand on a sidewalk in London, mesmerized, their jaws dropped at the sight of the overwhelming traffic. The husband explains to his wife: 'This is something, you see!? Our traffic jam doesn't even come close to this!' (Erdei, 1963).

The emergence and growth of the 'acquisitive society' (Tawney, 1920) and of fetishistic attitudes toward commodities hence appear to have been the feature that Hungarian cartoonists found most troubling and that figured most frequently in their work. The impressive wealth of cartoons thematizing this issue in the course of the relatively short period observed here corroborates this notion beyond doubt.[3]

The advent of consumerism and the phenomena engendered by demand-side abundance were obviously noticed and discussed by sociologists as well as cartoonists.

Critical sociology and the acquisitive society

In the opinion of those approaching the consumerism of the 1960s and 1970s from a scholarly platform, there was a bright side as well. For example, Márta Nagy of the Hungarian Institute for Public Opinion Research believed that the obsession with things 'democratized' the understanding of what it meant to be rich. Her representative survey (N = 784), conducted in 1973, asked the question 'Who are the rich?' and allowed entirely free responses with no limits to the length of the response or to the number of explanatory motives it could include. Content analysis revealed the most frequent motive among the responses to be the acquisition of durable goods (41%). Thus, when identifying rich and poor in a given society, respondents differentiated them in terms of the quantity and quality of durables acquired, rather than by social class and strata (28%) (Document 6, 1975).

Others, like Tamás Szecskő, director of the institute where Márta Nagy worked, came to think of a darker side of this issue when

3 In addition to those I have already discussed, here is a selection of more cartoons pertinent to this topic: Toncz, 1958a; Várnai, 1958a, 1958b; Pusztai, 1959; Szűr-Szabó, 1959a, 1959b; Gerő, 1960b; Kaján, 1960: cover; Balázs-Piri, 1962.

asked (probably by some high-level party authority, in preparation for the XIth Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party in March 1975) to produce a forecast of 'The ideological-political problems of our society' for the coming 15 years. In his first draft, Szecskő predicted a strengthening of 'individualistic orientation toward consumption; [and] growing doubts as to the [possible] emergence, [or even] the need for a socialist type of morality' (Document 7, 1974).

Before finalizing his text, Szecskő asked for the comments of two highly influential personalities of the time: Iván T. Berend, rector of the Karl Marx University of Economics, and Imre Pozsgay, deputy chief editor of the party's theoretical journal, *Társadalmi Szemle*. Berend jotted his comments by hand onto Szecskő's draft – and on the passage quoted from Document 7 above, he wrote in the margin:

> This is all very one-sided! […] the inverse of these problems will also present themselves. […] what is predictable: [is] 'anti-economism' turning against the 'growth orientation', […] social models starting out from 'moral' platforms, demands for a socialist structure of consumption in forms torn off realities. […] [as for the 'individualist orientation toward consumption'] […] *reactions* can be expected too: the other side of 'petit bourgeois [tendencies]': namely asceticist-anarchistic revolutionism, hostility toward 'consumption', egalitarianism and strong collectivist tendencies among the young.

There is a complex background to Berend's remarks, with an obvious, sharp edge toward the left. For one thing, the date is just about a year after the so-called 'Philosophers' Trial', a political-ideological purge directed against a circle of social theorists (like Ágnes Heller, György Márkus, and Mihály Vajda) and critical sociologists (like Mária Márkus and András Hegedüs), a circle often referred to as the Budapest (or Lukács) School. I am rendering the story in a nutshell. Hungarian reform Communism was facing a conservative backlash after the invasion of reform-Communist Czechoslovakia in August 1968. To save themselves and their achievements, and to show Moscow that they were still on the ball and had control over ideological-political developments at home, they decided to take the initiative and deliver a blow to what was considered to have been a (new) leftist tendency in Budapest intellectual life: critical sociology and its background in critical Marxist social theory (as cultivated particularly by Ágnes Heller and György Márkus). By May 1973, seven scholars had been removed from the party membership (if they had still been members at the time) and from their

academic jobs. In 1975, as a result of their joblessness and of the deliberate 'nudging' of the state security police, Heller, Ferenc Fehér, György and Mária Márkus left Hungary for the West. Sociologist Iván Szelényi soon joined them; he was forced to leave on account of his book (written in Hungary in 1973–1974, published in the West in 1979), *The intellectuals' road to class power* (Lehmann, 1998; Papp, 1989; Csizmadia, 1995).

Indeed, the official accusations against them (their close intellectual and personal relationship to Western New Left ideologues, their alleged condemnation of the economic reforms as a retreat to capitalism, uncritical adoration of various Western forms of collectivism from below, like the hippie communes, etc.) resonated significantly with Berend's comments on Szecskő's draft (Document 8, 1973: fols. 37–59).

Second, in the wake of Brezhnev's Thermidor (from August 1968 onward), the positions of reform-Communist politicians and policies and the positions of the so-called reform economists came under siege by the conservative Communist network in the party-state's higher- and lower-level apparatuses. Even though critical social theory and sociology had nothing to do with this conservative backlash, from a reform-Communist point of view they came to be treated under the same umbrella as the reform Communists' conservative challengers (Péteri, 2016).

Tamás Szecskő's first draft and its prediction, then, were no doubt inspired by the works of András Hegedüs and Mária Márkus.[4] Critical sociology was Hegedüs's professional credo; he believed that the role of social science scholarship in a socialist society was not merely to provide instrumental knowledge to those in power and to help people, in general, to understand things social. Also,

4 Szecskő did make a revision, however, with a new title ('A socio-political outline, 1975–1990'), which became radically more optimistic, upon the encouragement of Berend and Imre Pozsgay. Following Berend's suggestions (actually including Berend's commentary in the text, verbatim), he emphasized that one could expect 'a growth of trust in the fair and humanistic nature of socialist society, the emergence of a structure of consumption […] promoting better the development of socialist personality, and a healthier relationship, subjectively, to consumption goods; on the other hand, we will probably encounter, in some circles, an individualistic orientation toward consumption and, as a reaction against this, the budding of asceticist-anarchistic hostility toward consumption (probably, among the young)' (Document 7, 1974).

and most important, it should critically assess the direction in which political, social, and economic developments were taking the country in light of the professed values and visions informing the socialist project (Hegedüs, 1967; Document 9, 1968). Having been a Socialist himself, Hegedüs emphasized, the idea of socialism had never been to enable the development of only the productive forces, but of the 'the many-sided rehumanization of social relations'. Although he understood how important it was to achieve dynamic growth through 'marketizing' reforms, he wanted to raise a finger of warning lest 'optimization' (economic growth) should compromise and squeeze out the objectives of 'humanization' from the socialist agenda (Hegedüs, 1965). His hope was that

> [t]he times are not far away when the advantages of socialism over capitalism are measured not in terms of the growth of material-economic indices, but in terms of the humanization of social relations, when the decisive fact will be the existence of the possibility for the human personality to develop. (Document 10, n.d.)

But, as Hegedüs also emphasized:

> Material affluence in itself does not lead automatically to the broadening of the possibilities of human self-realization. […] we [socialist societies] still tend to be enchanted by economism and to be inclined to prove the high development level of our social system exclusively by the successes we think we achieved or desire to achieve in the economic sphere.

He warned that, on the platform of the same economism, 'it appears more and more as if the only civilizational path available for the further development of our society were that of the Western highly developed industrial societies in the past and the present' (Document 11, 1971).

Although Hegedüs had no quarrel with the basic ideas of reform economists, with their wish to dynamize economic growth by increasing the role of the market at the expense of bureaucratic coordination, he did object to turning economic growth into a 'value' (something to be pursued for its own sake). That was why he and his colleague, Mária Márkus, insisted on the need to define a civilization model different from that of the West, in that it would enable the values of humanization to rule supreme. With the contours of this new civilization in mind, he and Mária Márkus were offered the opportunity to undertake a critical assessment of the work of the Committee for Long-Term Planning of Labor Force and Living Standards in 1968–1969 (Péteri, 2016).

Hegedüs and Márkus were aware of the pull exercised by the soft power without:

> [I]n long-term planning, one must account for the system of values prevalent in society, in its various strata and for the ongoing changes of these values, as they will largely define the aspirations, needs, and, consequently, the structure of consumption of this society. In shaping the latter, the consumption model of more developed societies plays a role, in that it affects the mind of the people as a desirable pattern of civilization. The intensity of this effect will be partly a function of the extent to which socialist societies become open, which is an ongoing process that is impossible to stop, thanks to the fast development of the means of mass communication. The other factor influencing the intensity of the [demonstration] effect is the capability of socialist societies to posit their own model against [Western civilization], a model that preserves and includes the true values and achievements of [Western] civilization, but rejects the idea of taking on board the distortions of the Western consumption models caused by manipulation. (Document 12, 1969)

Without pretending that they knew exactly what the socialist model of civilization should look like, and, within it, consumption, Hegedüs and Márkus did not hesitate to spell out some fundamental distinctions and criteria relevant to the model. They believed that it was not only necessary but also possible to develop a systemically specific, socialist model of consumption. To achieve that model, they believed that not only income distribution but also needs and the ways in which needs were satisfied had to be actively influenced. They suggested that any discussion of a socialist model of consumption required the distinction between basic and aspirational (or differentiated) needs. Although both types of needs were informed and shaped by the general level of economic development, basic needs were such that their satisfaction had to be secured for everybody in society. Hegedüs and Márkus asserted that in Hungary, in the second half of the 1960s, healthy diet, clothing, housing, and cultural and educational opportunities, independent of and unlimited by one's income and wealth, should be regarded as basic needs, and they hoped it could be possible to secure them for all citizens of socialist Hungary within 15 to 20 years. In an even longer-term perspective, however, they believed that aspirational needs would assume an increasingly prominent role. Aspirational needs represent consumption over and above the level of basic needs or ways of satisfying basic needs, but in a non-standard manner (e.g., to have a roof over one's head is a basic need, but satisfying the basic need

for housing by buying a 400-square-meter villa in one of the most appealing green areas of the city is no doubt catering to aspirational needs).

Hegedüs and Márkus did recognize that aspirational needs had a legitimate place in a socialist society, as their satisfaction was important for the many-sided development of personality, for catering to individual expressivity – individual variation in needs and taste. But they also realized that, in stratified societies, differentiated needs tend to become attached to social position and status, generating consumption considered to be appropriate for and proportionate to the imagined or desired prestige. As they observed,

> in societies where, on account of significant shortages and/or the relatively low level of national income, broader masses are unable to buy commodities they would otherwise wish to obtain, prestige consumption is primarily focused on commodities not accessible to the masses. As the abundance of commodity supplies increase, living standards become higher, prestige consumption will target different types of the same commodities and, thus, objects performing by and large the same function will be produced in strongly differentiated 'classes', satisfying not merely individualized needs, but needs springing from status orientation. This tendency affects such services as luxury shops and high-class restaurants as well, of course (Document 12, 1969: 41).

Their socialist model of consumption could therefore include efforts to satisfy individualized needs serving the many-sided development of personality, but not status-oriented, prestige consumption.

From the point of view of my discussion, the key observation is the awareness among critical sociologists of the presence and significance of demand-side abundance. In a presentation written for a conference on industrial sociology, Hegedüs formulated the problem: 'the prevailing situation [in our society] is that the desire in people for commodities and services belonging in this category [the category of aspirational needs] grows faster than the rate at which society can meet these needs effectively' (Document 13, 1969).

This type of discussion received a further nudge from economist Éva Ehrlich, rightly famous for her work on the methodology of international and inter-systemic comparative studies of macro-economic structures and performance. Based on her calculations to show the co-relation between the level of economic development (per capita GDP) and the size of personal consumption (in terms of its share of the GDP), Ehrlich made the interesting observation that, 'in general, the gap in terms of personal consumption between

Table 1.1 Economic development of Hungary and economic development of the USA, Sweden, and the Federal Republic of (West) Germany (FRG) in 1965

Per capita	Hungary/USA	Hungary/Sweden	Hungary/FRG
Level of GDP	1: 4.5	1: 3.3	1: 2.4
Level of personal consumption	1: 3.8	1: 2.7	1: 2.2

Source: Ehrlich (1970, 1176–1177).

countries, both with regard to capitalist and with regard to socialist countries, tends to be smaller than the gap in terms of levels of economic development' (Ehrlich, 1970: 1176). Ehrlich's summary of the differences between the economic development of Hungary and the economic development of the USA, Sweden, and the Federal Republic of (West) Germany in 1965 are shown in Table 1.1.

Ehrlich's data and inter- and intra-systemic comparisons reveal that a highly potent international and inter-systemic demonstration effect (the very source of demand-side abundance) has been, in general, part of the relationship between the developed core and those lagging behind in the world system – all the way to the periphery. As she modestly put it, 'That this tendency asserts itself [so generally], is certainly to some extent due to the emerging intertwining of economies within and across the regions of the world' (Ehrlich, 1970, 1176).

In their paper for the International Sociological Conference on Modernization at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, 11–18 June 1972 (Document 14, 1972), Hegedűs and Márkus further elaborated on this aspect and its ramifications in terms of 'consumption model' and consumerism under state socialism. Indeed, they devoted a whole chapter to '[t]he impact of the consumption model of acquisitive society upon needs'. Their starting-point was articulated in the following manner:

> Today, partly because of the development of mass communications and partly because countries are less closed than they used to be (i.e., the world is increasingly becoming an open system), the influence exerted by the highly developed countries upon the other societies, among them the European socialist countries, is becoming greater and greater every year. (Document 14, 1972: 16)

They observed that consumption patterns prevalent in highly developed (capitalist) societies exercise a particularly strong influence upon the semi-developed socialist countries. Because of the relatively low living standards in these socialist countries, needs are generated that can be met only partially and at the cost of perverting the structure of consumption, leading people to sacrifice the satisfaction of some of the basic needs of their families and themselves. This perversion hits particularly hard in the lower strata, in which people, reaching out for the latest commonly pursued objects of desire, tend to omit from their consumption a number of 'transitional' civilizational achievements (things having to do with personal hygiene and a higher comfort level of housing – like running hot water) (Document 14, 1972: 17).

As one concrete instantiation of the anomalies in consumption generated by Western patterns of an acquisitive society in Hungary, Hegedüs and Márkus mentioned a paradox: although less than 40% of Hungarian households had running water inside their accommodation, more than 50% of them owned a washing machine. Major survey research conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Békés County found that 20% of the families living at a level *under* the statistically established existence minimum owned or were planning within the near future to buy a washing machine. The same measure was up to 60% among those living one level higher, but still in poverty (Document 14, 1972: 18).

These scholars also underlined the force with which the acquisitive model of consumption was asserted, given the aspirational needs generated. These needs were not only about use values, but were also expressive and projective of the illusions and hopes for a higher social status among members of certain strata. The characteristic examples of commodities the acquisition of which was allegedly motivated by the consumerist model of consumption of the developed capitalist countries are clothing, television, and private cars. Fashionable and 'correct' clothing can cost a great deal, and yet it is the cheapest way of projecting one's actual or wished-for social status, material situation, individual and familial success, and may therefore promote (or undermine) social integration. The project in Békés County found that parents would often accept serious economic sacrifices and allow their adult, actively working children to live with them at no cost, in order to enable them to clothe themselves 'appropriately' (Sas, 1972: 197ff). Even in state-socialist societies, the car was the iconic object of consumerism. There were plenty of instances of the

serious economic overstretch that consumer families were driven into by their acquisitive lust (Péteri, 2009: 9–11).

Hegedűs and Márkus concluded their discussion by revealing that the seeming historical choice was between the classic, Stalinist, 'public administration model' of socialism and the 'main road model'. Following the 'main road' meant market-oriented reforms and the recognition that socialist societies, if they were ever to catch up with the highly developed West, would have to allow Western patterns of consumption, the 'consumption model of acquisitive society', to assert themselves. The authors admitted that the main road model would serve the dynamization of the economy more consistently and efficiently and, as a result of that dynamization, engender improvements in living standards. Within certain limits, they conceded, it might even promote democratization. They warned that the main road model, 'even though it might not restore the private ownership of the means of production, would lead to an acquisitive type of profit-oriented society' (Document 14, 1972: 23). They feared that that road would lead to the demise of the socialist project.

They shared their anxiety with a number of other professionals and intellectuals in the country. In 1969, the Committee for Long-Term Planning of Labor Force and Living Standards of the Central Planning Office published its Working Hypotheses for what was meant to be the Hungary's 15-year plan for 1970–1985 (Huszár et al., 1969; Péteri, 2016: 255ff). Through that publication, the committee wished to invite the broader informed public to comment on their hypotheses. Showing how sincere they were in their intent to secure feedback, they even took the step of sending the Hypotheses to 209 people from various walks of life, with an accompanying letter asking for their opinion. They were sent to such intellectual professionals as economists, engineers, physicians, social scientists, writers, and publicists, as well as to people from the political-administrative class, such as politicians and public and economic administrators in leadership positions. They eventually managed to receive 71 responses, which eminent sociologist Zsuzsa Ferge was asked to process. In her report (Document 15, 1970), Ferge relates and quotes Respondent 58, with obvious sympathy and agreement:

> According to [this respondent] the main issue is not whether or not we will be able to perform the planned growth – it is, rather, what it means if we will? […] even at an optimal growth rate, the gap between us and the most developed capitalist countries will increase. […] i.e., at the end of the long-term plan's period, our place within the general tendency of 'rich getting richer and poor getting poorer'

> will be in the latter category. This will mean, according to the letter's writer, 'decent and struggling poverty', and this is what we should prepare our society for in education, literature, and popular enlightenment, […] trying to make it understood […] that while starvation and pauperism are an unacceptable state of things to be put an end to, decent 'poverty' can be the fundament of a worthier and happier life than the [Western] 'welfare state'. Comparisons with highly developed capitalist countries are misleading. Socialism is a qualitatively different world.

Conclusion

My survey of the discourses of critical reception of consumerism in Hungary yields a number of significant observations. First of all, it corroborates the headway made by a consumerist culture in Hungarian society from the second half of the 1950s and into the long 1960s. It has also enabled me to point out some specific aspects of demand-side abundance (a systemically contingent overflow of consumer needs and desires in excess of and beyond the constraints of resources at the household level and the national-economy level). Demand-side abundance is triggered by consumerism under the conditions of the state-socialist socio-economic order: various manifestations of the 'distortions of the structure of consumption', as the critical sociologists put it or, in other words, the ubiquitous *overstretch* characterizing consumer behavior. I have also shown that consumerism, demand-side abundance, and their ramifications in the state-socialist socio-economic order evoked highly complex reactions from contemporary observers and commentators.

These reactions were characterized by ambiguity. People welcomed the steps toward the emancipation (indeed, the creation) of the consumer citizen, toward recognizing people's right to seeking, working for, and enjoying what they understood to be a 'good life', toward market-oriented reforms that also held out hope for achieving a higher dynamism of economic–technological development and for securing higher living standards. But a number of tendencies that attended the advent of consumerism and demand-side abundance were feared, lamented about, and/or sharply critiqued: the sway of acquisitive lust over people, the fetishist adoration of commodities (especially of the prime objects of consumer desire), the erosion of some fundamental humanistic values, perverted hierarchies of preferences or priorities, and increasing social inequalities.

Many and various types of commentators (social-science scholars, ideologues, journalists, urban planners, architects, home economists) on modern society all over the world shared these fears for a very

long time. For example, one of the central concerns for the professionals, intellectuals, and politicians promoting the Tapiola housing project outside Helsinki, Finland, was exactly the expectation that with the progress of postwar reconstruction and increasing living standards, social developments in Finland would, to an all-too-great extent, be steered by demand-side abundance and consumerism rather than by Ebenezer Howard's, Lewis Mumford's, Patrick Geddes' and their contemporary Finnish followers' ideas about a good (healthy, cultured, well-balanced) life (Pantzar, 2013). Afraid of an overflow that would be detrimental in human-societal terms, they began the Tapiola project 'as an anti-urban, anti-consumerist and anti-individualistic utopia in the 1940s'. By the 1970s, Tapiola had developed 'into an urban, consumerist and individualistic community, heavily reliant on private transport. […] In a sense we can say that utopian plans to create new types of citizens were never realized' (Pantzar, 2013: 13). Just as demand-side abundance (consumerism) manifested itself on the Eastern side of the Cold War divide, these fears, too, came to the socialist countries of Communist Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (Gurova, 2018). Indeed, the anxiety here must have been even stronger for many, because what appeared to have been at stake here was the wellbeing of the socialist–Communist project itself. For whatever joys and pleasures (at least for some) may have been springing from consumerist, Western patterns of modernity, whatever satisfaction may have been engendered by leaving the horrors, deprivations, and imposed asceticism of the Stalin era behind, it was hard to suppress the systemic anxiety that many felt over the strength of 'gravitation' toward late modern, capitalist civilization and the eventual demise of the dream of a socialist society. This anxiety was articulated in the most sophisticated and best-argued manner by our critical sociologists, which is why they came into the crosshairs of the first and last purge in the history of Hungarian Communism, in which both reform Communists and conservative Communists condemned the victim, although with some disagreement about what punishment that victim deserved.

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Kaján, Tibor. Békekölcsön-húzáson ['At the lottery of Peace Bonds'] 570925.
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Toncz, Tibor. Külföldi kiküldetésben ['On assignment abroad'] 580612.
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2

Metamorphoses, or how self-storage turned from homes into hotels

Helene Brembeck

Approaching Christmas 2014, US columnist Patrick Clark complained in an article entitled 'Hoarder nation: America's self-storage industry is blooming':

> It's the time of the year when American households are filling up with stuff. Your living room is piled up with boxes from Black Friday haul, or your porch is creaking with the weight of UPS deliveries. While retail analysts are obsessively tracking buyer behavior to gauge the impact of Cyber Monday on store earnings, one industry that will surely benefit from the binge – eventually – is the storage business.

Clark's argument was that the growth of self-storage facilities attests to the fact that the accumulation of things is outpacing our capacity to keep them in our homes. He continued: 'Put that way, the storage business is a darker reflection of the retail economy. Shopping and exchanging holiday gifts are, ostensibly, joyous, but those objects are often deposited in storage units in sadder times' (Clark, 2014).

As we have repeatedly argued in the Managing Overflow project, too much stuff at home has been a moral center of debate since at least the late 1950s and early 1960s (Löfgren, 2012). Planning has been essential, and techniques for handling the growing influx of things developed both as a result of adjustments to everyday practices and professional help and guidelines and in consequence of an increasing assortment of furniture and accessories intended for storing things at home. As argued in Franck Cochoy's (2012) chapter in the first volume based on this project (*Managing overflow in affluent societies*), managing is about channeling flows, not about producing overflows. But when overflow eventually occurs, a new managerial task begins: overflow channeling and/or reduction (Cochoy, 2012: 52). The same goes for overflow handling in the home (Brembeck,

2014). As Löfgren (2012) noted, the most drastic transformation is relocation and recontextualization outside the home: to the flea market, thrift store, or waste-disposal station (see also Åkesson, 2012). The market for sell-and-buy has recently been growing, as has the number of give-away sites for used items (Brembeck, 2014). Sometimes things end up being stored in holiday homes (Löfgren, 2012) or even workplaces (Ekström, 2013). It is in this landscape of storage, disposal, and waste that self-storage facilities have emerged.

Self-storage, which began to appear in the mid-1990s, is now spreading all over the Western world. Basically, they are buildings with storage units of various sizes that one can rent for a shorter or longer period as a repository for one's belongings. The Self-Storage Association defines self-storage units more precisely as facilities offering rental on a month-to-month basis in which the tenant applies the lock and has sole access to the unit (Sonne, 2013). Shurgard is the leading company in the European market; its US collaborator, Public Storage, is the world's largest owner-operator of self-storage facilities, with over one million customers and more than 2,200 facilities.

Self-storage facilities are often related to an abundance of stuff. In this chapter, I argue that they can be conceptualized in relation to the creation of currents and pools required in the process of managing overflow.

Origins of out-of-home storage

Although self-storage is a relatively recent phenomenon, the storing of personal possessions outside the home began much earlier. According to stories circulating on the webpages of self-storage companies, personal storage has existed from the earliest of times; 6,000 years ago the people of Xian, in present-day China, are reported to have stored personal belongings in clay pots in public underground storage units.

The next chapter in the history of storage seems to have been written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, during the build-up of the British Empire, when British banking institutions were asked to safeguard valuables for clients on extended journeys. The banks turned to the moving (drayage) companies for storage, and the movers produced storage space in primitive lofts (Darden, 2001). Later, banks assumed responsibility for their own storage in strong-rooms built in the basements of banks with vaulted ceilings – hence the word 'vault'.

But bank officials gladly relate a grand history of generic safekeeping dating back many thousands of years to ancient Egypt, where powerful individuals were entrusted with valuables in return for a fee. The first traces of a lockable device that resembled a key were reportedly discovered in the tomb of Pharaoh Ramses II, who reigned in the thirteenth century BCE.

In more recent times, banks kept customers' valuables in open vaults, typically in a trunk or case containing the family's silver and jewelry. The safety-deposit box was introduced in the 1850s, and the first independent safety-deposit company, the Safety Deposit Company of New York, was established in 1865. Modern bank vaults typically contain columns of safety-deposit boxes alongside other valuable assets belonging to banks or their customers (like Metropolitan Safe Deposit in the UK).

Although the typical bank's safety-deposit box contained only such valuables as gold, silver, and jewelry, the original moving and storage pioneers, the US firm Bekins, devised the first warehouse in the 1850s specifically constructed for household goods and treasured personal items. A first step toward modern self-storage was the introduction of the long-term storage of cars, introduced in the early 1900s: interconnected metal garages for 'cars without homes' (Darden, 2001). The operator or landlord usually had responsibility for the stored items, and customers could not come and go as they pleased using their own keys. The switch to self-storage as we know it today, in which customers have free access to their personal storage, began in the mid-1960s, when Russ Williams and Bob Munn built the first self-storage facility in Texas, one of a chain with the somewhat awkward but pedagogically correct name, A-1 U-Store-It U-Lock-It U-Carry-the-Key.

Modern storage facilities grew slowly through the 1990s, at which time demand outpaced supply and caused a rush of new self-storage developments in the USA. Over 3,000 new facilities were built every year between 2000 and 2005. By 2013, there were 55,000 establishments in the USA, and even though the average citizen's living space was growing, every tenth US citizen was renting a storage unit (Mattsson, 2013).

Self-storage did not arrive on the European continent until the early 1980s, when the first units appeared in the United Kingdom, initially in the London area. By 2014 there were more than 1,000 facilities across the country, representing approximately 3.5 million square meters of rentable space. By 2017 there were 15,000 facilities in Europe, and the Federation of European Self-Storage Associations (FEDESSA) was publishing annual industry surveys and organizing

conferences. The UK still has 45% of all European storage facilities, followed by France (13%) and the Netherlands (11%); Sweden holds only 5% of all European storage space. If one accounts for population, however, a different situation emerges. The British have the largest area of self-storage space per capita at 0.50 square meters, followed by the Dutch at 0.47 square meters, who are in their turn closely followed by the Swedes at 0.40 square meters per capita. But every European country is far behind the USA, where storage space per resident averages 0.70 square meters (FEDESSA 2014).

Overconsumption and the virtue of orderliness

The phenomenon of self-storage has been introduced in several ongoing discussions in science and the popular media. The media generally interpret it as a result of overconsumption and overflow in people's homes, as illustrated in Patrick Clark's lament quoted at the introduction of this chapter. Scientific accounts, too, generally position self-storage as an expression of overconsumption. Design and material-culture scholar Neil Maycroft argued that '[t]he rapid growth of the domestic storage industry over the last decade can be seen as evidence of the growing volume of goods that have to somehow be dealt with, sorted or assigned to the various practices of disposition on offer' (Maycroft, 2009: 356). According to Clive Hamilton (2010: 573), self-storage can be regarded both as the epitome of consumerism ('first they make us buy things, then they invent self-storage to keep our stuff and make us buy more') and its opposite – sustainability ('it's good that people do not throw things away, but save them to be repaired').

This reference to overflow in the home as a reason why people require personal self-storage units can occasionally be found on the webpages of the self-storage companies as well. This excerpt from the webpage of Public Storage eventually argues for the need of a personal storage:

> You're in the middle of making dinner and you reach for a good chopping knife. You know it's in the drawer somewhere. Probably buried under the pile of plastic forks from dozens of takeout meals, the As Seen on TV Pogo Whisk, and the 10 spatulas you've acquired over the years. Your frustration mounts, but you can relax because we have expert tips to help you organize your kitchen.

This excerpt from the post 'Three steps to organize your kitchen like a pro' is indicative of another bulk of discourses in relation to storing: to see storing generally (self-storage is seldom mentioned

in this context) as the flipside of clutter. Clutter and storage have become central in consumer life and have paved the way for new services and storage systems – a fast-growing market ready to provide solutions. Television programs, magazines, and handbooks specializing in the problems of home storage teach people how best to organize, categorize, sort, and discard their belongings (Belk et al., 2007; Roster, 2015; Löfgren, 2017).

The horrors of hoarding

The concept of hoarding and connecting hoarding and cluttering seems to be particularly prominent in the USA, where discussions about 'hoarding disorder' have been intense. In his book *The hoarders*, Scott Herring (2014) claimed that hoarding came to be classified as a deviation in the USA, basing his claim on three famous cases: the Collyer brothers, found dead, buried in the collapsed mountains of newspapers and other junk in their New York apartment in the 1930s; Andy Warhol, who was after his death revealed to have been a manic collector of everything and anything; and the former New York celebrities and relatives of Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, Big and Little Edie – mother and daughter – leading an exotic life in their run-down New Hampshire villa, Grey Gardens, which was filled with rubbish. The analysis, which borrows concepts from Mary Douglas, Stanley Cohen, and Michel Foucault, connects hoarding with modernity and presents it as the antithesis of order. In this way, hoarders become one of the 'folk devils' of our time, deterrent examples of what is wrong and abnormal – warning examples of how not to be, reminding us that society needs to maintain order.

As Orvar Löfgren showed in several of his works (see, e.g., Frykman and Löfgren, 1987, and Löfgren in this volume), horror of mess and obsession with order have been running through the twentieth century to the present day in Sweden as well. Links have been made between messy homes and messy lives, persons, and minds. The battle against messiness has been conducted on many frontiers and has become part of the moral economy of the ideal home – often linked to new ideas of scientific management of the household in the first decades of the twentieth century (Scott, 2014; Löfgren, 2017). Another research current with some bearing on this text is consumer studies, especially the investigation of certain spaces as liminal: the garage for men (Hirschman et al., 2012) and children's rooms left intact for empty nesters (Curasi et al., 2001). Problems of unrestrained consumer habits, uncontrolled clutter, and

shrinking space can be seen as the cultural and historical backdrop to the present-day situation.

Flows, channels, and resting-places

This chapter explores a different strand of research – one that recognizes the home not simply as a place but also as a set of spaces, channels, and flows into which objects find their way, sometimes going through and out of the home (see, for example, Cwerner and Metcalfe, 2003). In the Managing Overflow project, we have repeatedly shown that a basic skill in today's Western consumer societies is the ability to manage the inflow and outflow of things at home (Czarniawska and Löfgren, 2012; 2013). It is necessary to select, sort, and control the inflow in order to have enough storage space at home and a controlled divestment strategy (Brembeck, 2014). We are following researchers like Nicky Gregson, who suggested that it would be good to regard disposal in terms of 'moving things along' (Gregson et al., 2007), and thus extend the lives of these things rather than terminating them; and Cwerner and Metcalfe (2003), who said that the home can be understood as a system of channels and flows. From this perspective, storage can be seen as providing the means of organizing space and controlling clutter, thus creating proper flows through homes and lives. This is also in accordance with Cochoy's remark that management is basically about (producing and) channeling flows (2012: 52). Cwerner and Metcalfe suggested that the house also comprises flows of people, and that their movements through the house may, but ought not to be, impeded by the accumulation of stuff, working as 'blood clots stopping the flow of vitality in the body' (2003: 233).

Although Cwerner and Metcalfe never left the home in their analysis, as they were interested in such places as corners, spaces under tables, spare bedrooms, attics, and basements, they did put forward a significant argument: if homes are channels and flows, they require moments of rest and storage. This argument can be extended to self-storage as well.

One of the rare examples of a self-storage study is Neil Maycroft's 'Not moving things along' (2009), in which he analyzed storage spaces in and outside the home. Even though his perspective was somewhat different from that of Cwerner and Metcalfe, he, too, saw storage units as resting-places for stuff with uncertain trajectories waiting to be destroyed, reused, or moved. It seems, therefore, that flows and circulation require 'pools' – spaces of stillness, rest, and reflection

for objects and people. This is certainly the way the store managers I have been interviewing wanted the storage units to be understood: as a way of managing the flow of stuff in consumer society.

Methods and material

The relevance of studying self-storage in relation to currents and pools emerged during data collection in Gothenburg, Sweden, during the fall of 2015 and the spring of 2016. The study consisted of interviews with store managers, staff, and the CEO of Self-Storage Sweden, along with an analysis of webpages and marketing campaigns, and annual reports and newsletters from Self-Storage Sweden and other European and US organizations. Most important, the basis of this chapter consists of fieldwork at Humlan – a local self-storage facility in Gothenburg.[1]

I visited Humlan, spent time with staff now and then for a few weeks, learned all I could about the business, and interviewed the manager, the founder, and the present owner. I also studied their webpage, information leaflets, and everything I could find about Humlan on the Internet. This material has been subjected to comparisons in the search for cross-cutting themes. Particularly, my interest was drawn to the way self-storage facilities were positioned as normal and natural ways for people to handle their stuff. Strategies such as 'cozyfying' and 'safe-making' were recognized. The story of the introduction of Humlan to Sweden has proved especially valuable for this purpose. It illustrates these processes of normalization, which I describe in what follows. I wrap up the chapter by returning to the argument that self-storage can and should be studied in relation to flows, currents, and pools.

Normalizing self-storage

Normalizing self-storage means building infrastructures, finding land, constructing buildings, and recruiting staff. But this is not

1 A few months after I had completed my fieldwork, Humlan was acquired by a larger self-storage company, 24Storages. 24Storages' concept is based on smaller-than-average facilities, greater automation, and locations closer to the customer's home. It was a good fit with that concept. Carl, Humlan's founder, told me that he sold the family business not because it was not doing well, but because no one in the next generation wanted to take charge of the company (personal communication).

enough. Owners need to make the whole notion of storage known to people, to make the routines of storage fit people's everyday practices, and they need to create meaning – stories that fit their ideas and images of storage and the way it is performed. Therefore, they must act at the intersection between business and culture. Storage needs to become the accepted node or assemblage of materiality, meanings, and practices in overflow management.

Making self-storage and storing a normal and accepted part of everyday life does not happen by itself. Normalization takes a great deal of work, especially if something new is being introduced. Here Humlan is a particularly interesting case, as it was founded in 1988 – nearly 30 years ago – as the first self-storage company in Sweden.

A first challenge for the founder, Carl, was translating the concept of self-storage and the architecture of the buildings to a Swedish context. In 1988, spending money on renting storage space in a building far from home was alien to Swedes. Stuff was traditionally stored at home – in closets, attics, and basements. In the countryside there were additional options: sheds, outbuildings, and barns.

To make the concept of distant storage appealing to a Swedish audience, the founder wanted to associate it with the home, making the storage unit resemble ordinary storage in the cellar or attic. The very name was a problem. In Britain, where the first European self-storage facilities were launched, they were called 'warehouses', but this word was associated with something big – something that only business companies would use. Humlan used the term 'mini warehouse' (*minilager*), but the subsequent designation of 'storage' (*förråd*) was more suitable. It seemed to denote something smaller and less businesslike, although the English term 'self-storage' did not translate well into Swedish. Now, the preferred denomination in the self-storage business is *hyrförråd* ('rental storage').

Carl also believed that the buildings needed to be of good quality and appear sturdy and home-like, which he did not think was always the case in the USA, where he had gone to study the concept. Thus, the outer walls of Humlan's buildings were wooden, resembling the solid barns of the Swedish countryside. One of their facilities has even received an architectural prize. The name Humlan (meaning 'the Bumblebee') was derived from the name of the site of the first storage facility, but of course the association with the diligent bumblebee collecting nectar was perfect for a homey association. The buildings were painted black and yellow, the colors of the bumblebee, and decorated with bumblebee images, the logo of Humlan. The private storage units inside were supposed to look

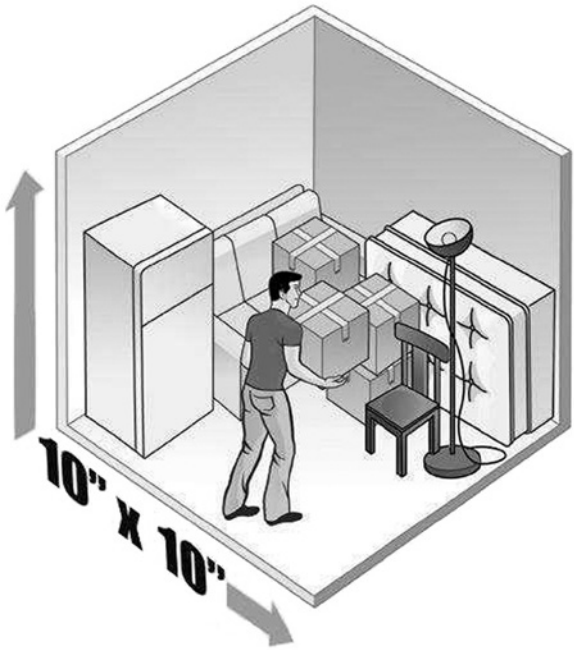

Figure 2.1 Teaching customers storing techniques

similar to ordinary storage in the attic or basement of apartment buildings. Carl thought that the US storage units were small and that Swedes needed more space. There should also be a slower tempo and a more personal atmosphere, with helpful staff that were not exclusively preoccupied with the idea of 'selling, selling, selling like in the USA', Carl told me. The first storage facilities provided sofas and coffee machines (coffee being the typical Swedish drink) for *fika*: a break and a chat.

Customers were still uncertain of what this new thing was all about, and they often wanted to examine the premises before deciding to rent. They also needed a great deal of help and instructions on how to use their storage unit and what to keep in it. ('Things you do not need at the moment, seasonal objects, and valuable possessions', the ads read.) They had to learn rules and regulations: only dry objects and no flammable or hazardous goods were allowed in the storage units; rugs and textiles had to be laminated and tightly sealed to protect them from insects. Customers learned about opening hours, hygiene, alarms, the loading and unloading of goods, and

the workings of the lock codes. They were also given a great deal of practical help and tools – boxes, tapes, wrapping paper, bubble wrap, and padlocks. They were provided with handcarts and wagons to ease transportation and were taught how to calculate the number of boxes that would fit in storage units of various sizes and how many boxes were needed for the contents of a regular flat. The impression, staff members told me, was that people generally needed smaller spaces, but for longer periods than they had thought necessary, and the personnel tried to educate their customers. Service was important. Good relationships were developed with returning customers. The receptionist at Humlan placed gifts she had received from grateful clients on the windowsill of her workspace.

Making storage harmless, cozy, and safe

This was not all that needed to be done. Although the concept of 'hoarding disorder' was not mentioned in the interviews, all interviewees were aware of media representations of out-of-home storage as somber, uncomfortable places. Urban folklore, films, and crime novels often situate shady activities in attics or basements with long, winding corridors – spaces that are dark, dirty, unsafe, and mysterious. The iconic place is a turn-of-the-twentieth-century Victorian apartment block, with a creaky elevator going several floors up to spooky attics or down to spooky basements. It is not difficult to imagine the uneasy feeling when lights go off and one finds oneself in complete darkness, with only rats and rustling old newspapers as companions. Cellars and attics are often presented as places out of control. It is not too far-fetched to assume that this cultural backdrop was behind the strategies that store managers and staff invented to attract customers. For them it was vital to create the feeling that everything was under control, to erase the scary images that rendered storage facilities the antithesis of order and safety. Three strategies in particular were visible in the field material: making them harmless, cozy, and safe.

Making them harmless: the storage facility needed to be clean, bright, and orderly. Humlan's interior is painted white and spotlessly clean, with no rubbish in sight. Bright lamps, burning 24 hours a day every day, spread a clear light over the facility. The corridors are neither long nor winding; the premises consist of several small compartments joined together, making every compartment easy to access, and the customer is always close to the main corridor and entrance. The storage units are dry and warm, with eco-friendly

geothermal heating, and the customer is required to clean the storage unit properly before vacating it.

Cozyfying: there are also measures that make the storage facility a nicer, maybe even homier place. The walls of Humlan are decorated here and there with brightly colored pictures – mostly framed ads for the company. There are flowers and furniture for seating in the reception area, soft music often plays in the corridors, and the staff are supposed to be service-minded and helpful – but, as we shall see, only to a certain degree.

Safe-making is essential. The premises are equipped with a burglar alarm, fire alarms, and video surveillance; tamper-proof steel gates at the entrance require personal key cards; security guards patrol after dark; and the personal storage units are protected from view. Clients can buy additional insurance against fire, water, and theft. The fact that the staff are advertised as 'strongly involved in the daily operations' is supposed to enhance the clients' feelings of safety.

Interviewees mentioned other images of storage facilities: magical places filled with treasures or gateways to magical worlds, like the wardrobe in the Narnia books, opening up new worlds. Several people mentioned TV series like the American *Storage Wars* and *Storage Hunters*, in which the participants compete or bet on the contents of storage units of tenants who disappeared with unpaid bills. The CEO of the Swedish Self-Storage Association told me that he had been approached several times by TV producers who wanted to create Swedish equivalents, but he refused. For one thing, this phenomenon does not exist in Sweden, simply because storage rents are higher here and customers are generally better off, according to Carl. This duality of the mysterious and the precious is also a reminder that overflows, such as the one that can be found in a self-storage facility, can be seen as generating nervousness and uncertainty on the one hand and opportunities and richness on the other (Czarniawska and Löfgren, 2012; 2013).

These strategies of translation were essential for the normalization of self-storage, making them obvious instances of people managing their stuff in a way they could feel good about. As an ad for Humlan promises: 'Leave your stuff safely stored. Just like at home.'

Home or hotel

Advertising self-storage as 'just like at home', as Humlan does, may have been essential at the introduction of self-storage; but 'home-like' soon became problematic. Some clients started to use the facilities

as social meeting spaces. Craftspeople who stored their tools there started to spend time and have coffee together; elderly ladies socialized with the staff and never wanted to leave. The staff sometimes acted as therapists for newly divorced or widowed clients (part of the special skills the company emphasized). Clients more or less moved into their private storage units, or used them as garages or workshops, bringing tools, repairing old cars and other used stuff. This was not the purpose of the units, the managers told me. Swedes had not perceived them correctly. The facilities were not supposed to be social meeting-places. They should be kept simple and practical; their function is supposed to focus on self-service, where people come and go. People are not supposed to stay there and make themselves comfortable. Self-storage facilities were never supposed to be homes – not for stuff and certainly not for people. Something had gone wrong in the translation. The companies had to learn how to teach their clients what self-storage was about if they wanted a better balance between the desires and habits of their customers and their own interests.

So Humlan began to launch itself into a new image. Coffee machines were removed, which decreased chitchat among customers, and electric outlets were taken out of the private storage units, making it impossible to use them as workshops. Later the overhead light fixtures had to be removed, because people found imaginative ways to connect their electric equipment to the sockets. Private storages were sufficiently illuminated by light in the corridors, staff members argued. But something needed to be done on a conceptual level as well. The managers I spoke to told me that they currently use the 'hotel' as the key metaphor. Hotels are modern, clean, efficient, and inviting, but not necessarily personal. The concept of the hotel is also a way to teach clients that self-storage facilities are not places to stay; they are meant to enhance mobility, speed, and circulation, to permit people to take care of things that flow from one place to another.

The translation of self-storage facilities from 'homes' to 'hotels for stuff' also facilitated an imagined and desirable future of the business on the part of the owners: digitalizing self-storage facilities, reducing staff and costs by running them from a distance with the help of call centers, video surveillance, and digital codes that could be downloaded from the Internet. At least a younger generation of Swedes should be comfortable with this kind of digital self-service, they claimed, the same way that younger people had learned to use e-commerce, carpools, and food-box schemes over the Internet. To

maintain the everyday, local character of storage, it was necessary to have smaller facilities, close to where people lived, instead of huge barns outside the cities. On the other hand, transport to and from the storage facility could be arranged using the computer. Recently storage companies have started taking care of this bit as well, delivering portable storage units, 'smartboxes', directly to the consumer's doorstep. The whole process of self-storing can be run from the computer, just like other ways of handling overflow, such as buying and selling stuff on eBay.

Understanding self-storage: currents and pools

It is obvious that the concepts of flow and channeling are critical elements in the daily operations of self-storage; managers must keep stuff and people in motion, especially if they are to prevent the perception of certain spaces as liminal – men's garages (Hirschman et al., 2012) or 'blood clots' (Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003: 233) in the storage system. As I have shown in this chapter, several measures were taken to keep circulation going – from the simple measures of removing coffee machines, electric sockets, and light fixtures to the more extreme measures of auctioning off abandoned storage units on US television. By definition, a large majority of the clients are older people 'flowing' from houses to flats, and the rest are people of all ages moving together and apart. There is also an obvious mobility between generations – the stuff inherited from the grandparent generation flows into the homes of children and grandchildren, and the stuff belonging to teenagers who have left home needs to be moved elsewhere. And the residuals of wardrobe clearances – those clothes too precious to be thrown away – must be channeled somewhere else to make room for new stuff. In the channeling process, self-storage facilities have emerged as powerful new actors. And styling consultants use storage facilities as a temporary place for furniture to be located while an apartment is being redecorated to match a more fashionable aesthetic and be sold. There is also a more tragic and less glamorous use of storage: those rented by the social services for victims of evictions. There is good evidence for viewing self-storage as an extension of the system of channels and flows that makes up a home.

There is also plenty of evidence that self-storage facilities enable the mobility not only of stuff, but also of people – the changing representation of self-storage from home to hotel testifies to this as well. The CEOs provided insights into this change and the altered

representation of the consumer from a person who needs space for excess stuff – such as the customer who just inherited granny's old sofa, has no space for it, but does not want to discard it – to a mobile person with an ever-changing lifestyle, moving between cities, countries, jobs, houses, and relationships. The ideal customer is similar to a middle-class businessperson or a globetrotter traveling around the world with lots of money to spend. For the CEOs, self-storage is not about such a trivial thing as storing goods, but about enhancing mobility and a modern lifestyle: an imaginary concept placing customers far from the image of the hoarder, the addictive consumer, and the muddy terrains of drug use, criminality, and prostitution as depicted in media representations.

Just as important are rest and stillness. Self-storage is not there merely to enhance flows, but also to provide temporary resting-places where objects can be kept well protected, safe, and in good repair. As Parsons and Maclaran (2009) have argued, the relationship between the moving of things in relation to space is clearly under-researched, and few studies of cupboards, attics, and basements have been undertaken. One of the few is Maycroft's (2009) study of hoarding, but he pitted hoarding against 'acceptable practices of re-situating objects in space' (2009: 360), of which 'commercial storage facilities' is one. In fact, he defined self-storage as the most remote places in an outward movement from the home, which can explain the necessity of integrating them in the home sphere, in order to normalize them. Maycroft's view of self-storage as temporary resting-places for stuff with uncertain futures is a good starting-point. Prospective tenants find themselves in an uncomfortable position: They do not really know how to handle certain stuff, but what will the next step be? For the newly divorced and the globetrotter, storage units are resting-places for things belonging to people with uncertain futures.

From the actor–network perspective informing the project (Latour, 1988), one learns that even the humblest new actant in a network changes the network as a whole. What role does this give self-storage in the process of managing overflow? The space of a personal self-storage – a space that is safe, warm, tidy, bright, and expensive – is obviously something different from one of Maycroft's examples: the space behind sheds at the backs of gardens, where objects inevitably undergo transformations due to weather, climate, and natural processes of decay. First, self-storage invites or symbolizes a new sorting practice, which resonates with Cwerner and Metcalfe's (2003) insistence that self-storage is fundamentally about training

minds and bodies through the adoption of good organizational routines: disciplining bodies as well as learning new routines and ways of handling stuff, to which the staff at Humlan testify. Second, self-storage creates a new category of stuff in the sorting process: those things that are too bulky to keep at home, too valuable in economic or sentimental terms to sell, to give away, or to throw away, yet need a well-protected, safe, and spotlessly clean temporary storage-place – things deserving of the economic sacrifice involved in renting storage space. It is a way of honoring stuff in a consumer society by paying for its resting-place and giving it the chance of a second life – maybe even be upgraded to parading in the living-room again. Third, self-storage says something about the possibility of buying oneself time to make the final decision and enabling the chain of inevitable circulation to proceed at a slower pace, the comfort of not hurrying, not having to decide, of waiting – or, for the mobile consumer, freedom from the burden of stuff without having to dispose of it.

Self-storage can also be understood as erasing the border between what Erving Goffman (1959) called front stage (the tidy front regions of the home) and back stage (the messier back regions). Via self-storage, the dismal back regions of storage are drawn into discourses of cleanliness and tidiness, and rendered presentable for outsiders. The spaces for unsorted soiled rubble in the household are diminishing, as stuff-managing becomes transparent and open to public inspection. No one but the tenant has access to the actual storage unit, but the companies do their best to teach clients how to organize them in a proper and rational way by drawing a plan of the storage unit and teaching customers the best arrangement for their stuff, keeping everything in boxes with those things that are often needed close to the door, and piling boxes up to the ceiling at the back of the storage to make good use of the space (see Figure 2.1).

Slowing down the circulation of stuff allows people time to sort out relationships with important things in their lives (and allows things time to sort out relationships with their owners), in the same way people sometimes need to sort out their personal relationships in conversation with a counselor. The way Humlan's staff took pride in their roles as therapists reveals people's close relationships to their stuff and the sadness of parting and ending relationships. This new actant in the overflow-managing network may also be regarded in terms of a possible new relationship to individual possessions which entails loosening the ties between individuals and

their possessions, maybe even paving the way for new practices in relation to stuff: renting, sharing, lending, and co-owning.

In summary, self-storage can be understood as an attempt to have one's temporarily superfluous stuff in a safe resting-place while utilizing the opportunity to wait, think, and reflect, or to travel around the world without having to carry the burden of one's possessions.

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3
Moving in a sea of strangers: handling urban overflows

Orvar Löfgren

Overflow at the border

I approach the improvised identity check at Malmö's Central Station, in the southernmost part of Sweden. It was established in the fall of 2015 to control the rapidly growing number of refugees. Coming from Copenhagen airport, wheeling my neat carry-on bag, I am waved through quickly, the policeman barely glancing at the identity card I am holding like a talisman, while the migrants behind me, dragging all sorts of luggage, from battered suitcases and backpacks to plastic bags, are being stopped and scrutinized.

My brisk walking pace and my light carry-on bag signal that I probably belong to the category of mobile persons associated with a number of favorable connotations. Perhaps my luggage is loaded with the social and cultural capital of a desirable cosmopolitanism, the good transnational flow of ideas, creativity, or commerce. Such desirable mobility should be made as friction-free as possible with the help of frequent-flyer cards, VIP lounges, and fast tracks. It is a question of creating and maintaining a frictionless flow.

The groups of new migrants, on the other hand, are discussed in terms of problematic overflow. During the fall of 2015, refugees trying to enter Europe were often said to create liquid flows, metaphors of water, waves, floods, rising tides, or even human tsunamis – faceless, impersonalized masses, wading ashore on Greek or Italian beaches or trudging through fields or along narrow rural paths. Refugees became a depersonalized mass and turned into an uncontrollable flow, surging into Europe (but see the discussion in Christenfeld, 1996). Such tempting metaphors of flowing liquidity led to talk about 'stemming the tide' of the flood, which as soon as new obstacles,

barbed wire, or identity checks were installed, found new ways of trickling north. British Prime Minister David Cameron talked about the migration as a 'swarm' (Kingsley, 2016: 42).

The metaphor of overflow was also used to describe the situation in the host countries. How many refugees can we absorb? When does the breaking-point occur? The question of too many could take many forms: too many unidentified persons, too great a burden on welfare institutions – schools, healthcare, and social benefits – or too much foreign cultural influence threatening the nation. All over Europe such questions were formulated in different ways, and 'too many' varied a great deal from country to country and from one political position to another. In an interview with Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg, a journalist asked what constitutes too much. Why did Norway stop at 30,000 refugees in the crisis of 2015, whereas Sweden took in 163,000? The Prime Minister replied: 'There are limits to the number of newly arrived persons that can be handled by countries like Norway and Sweden.' Integrating asylum seekers is costly, she argued, and to keep the welfare system working, immigration must be controlled.[1] Control turned out to be a key argument, as the inflow of undocumented persons or illegal entries would cause new disorders and loss of control.

Being part of a faceless crowd or a wave was a new experience for many refugees – very different from being an individual traveler. A cosmopolitan Syrian doctor, accustomed to taking his family on vacations abroad or traveling to conferences, no longer experienced a smooth transition across borders as a visitor, a scientist, or a tourist; he became a problem. Now he was part of an unwanted overflow, which had to be controlled and contained; he was de-personalized in a sea of strangers.[2]

1 Vad kan Erna Solberg lära Anna Kinberg Batra? *Dagens Nyheter*, 10 February 2017, http://www.dn.se/nyheter/politik/vad-kan-erna-solberg-lara-anna-kinberg-batra/, accessed 2017–09–11.

2 My discussion of the contemporary experiences of migrants and refugees is based on a number of travel narratives. Charlotte McDonald-Gibson (2016) and Kingsley (2016) present such materials, but also good overviews of the European refugee crisis. Other strong detailed accounts are found in Collins (2017) and Schmidle (2015). For a general discussion and analysis of the crisis see, for example, Glorius and Doomernik (2016), Rolshoven and Schlör (2016), and de Genova (2017). The Wikipedia article 'European migrant crisis' (2017) contains a wealth of information on the crisis, with statistics, changing travel routes, and extensive coverage of the media debate.

The current situation in Europe is nothing new. Rising flows of migrants have shaped societies in many historical situations, not least during the last two centuries. In such circumstances, it is possible to see the rapid transformation of people from unique individuals with certain identities to members of a faceless crowd – at best, as numbers in a line. During his exile in the 1930s, Stefan Zweig, himself a Jewish refugee, experienced this transformation. Jews were no longer journalists, authors, or managers, he said; they were reduced to being one of those refugees (Prochnik, 2014).

How is a faceless flow of people created, and how is the overflow handled? There is a long academic history of discussing such problems, from ideas of the new mass society to sensory and social overload in the bustling new urban settings of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I want to return to some of these debates, but also to move back in history for other reasons. I think a good starting-point for understanding the making of overflows and strategies for managing them is the emergence of modern mass travel and the growth of big cities. As new travel technologies and patterns of migrating and commuting took shape in the industrializing world of the nineteenth century, there was a need to learn a new skill – how to move in a sea of strangers. How should one deal with an overflow or overload of people – faces, movements, gestures, and impressions from strangers – and at a quickening pace? Questions of anonymity, intimacy, and distance came to the foreground – a new psychology of handling crowds. Today many of these skills have become tacit, merely taken-for-granted routines and reflexes; but at that time, people had to acquire the ability to cope with the situation step by step.

At Malmö Station in 2015, the usually smooth transit machine turned into something else. Rush-hour commuters mixed with groups of refugees, police checkpoints, social workers, and volunteers trying to handle the situation. Under what circumstances does such an influx of people turn into a challenging overflow, and for whom? My chapter begins with a historical analysis, looking at some of the ways in which mass travel was dealt with in order to show that a crisis like that of 2015 must be understood against a long process in which flows of people were handled by a gradual development of new systems of logistics, controls, and cultural competences from the late nineteenth century onward. My theme is threefold: the ways in which the travel market learned to deal with the situation; the challenge for the authorities who were to monitor, identify, and control the flow of people; and the challenges for individual travelers,

navigating in a sea of strangers and learning new and necessary skills. How does one learn to travel as a commuter or a migrant?

I begin by moving back to the 1880s.

Meeting strangers

> The bustling streets in Paris remind one of the congestion and movements which occur when you poke at an ant stack. Masses of people moving in all directions, in a frightening way. (Goncourt, 1927: II: 109)

This is Edmond de Goncourt writing in 1881. At that point in history, growing urban crowds caused both fascination and anxiety. The world was in an intensive era of globalization, culminating in the First World War. People, ideas, and commodities were moving across borders in unprecedented numbers. Migration went from countryside to cities and across continents, creating confrontations with strangers from diverse backgrounds.

These new patterns of migration and mobility caused intense public debate, but also a growth of academic research. The sociologies and psychologies of crowds and interaction between strangers expanded (Borch, 2012). Much of this research was directed toward concrete ways of handling citizens and strangers. Issues like crowd control and administration of large numbers of people on the move were important. As early as 1851, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon had written about this trend and about people having to be 'noted, registered, enumerated, accounted for, stamped, measured, classified, audited, patented, licensed, authorised, endorsed, reprimanded, prevented, reformed, rectified and corrected, in every operation, every transaction, every movement' (quoted in Saunders, 2016: 7).

Although Proudhon, an anarchist, was exaggerating these state interventions (in retrospect, the new era of globalization was also characterized by a lessening of state control), he quite correctly predicted a new political and scientific interest in identifying and classifying individuals, groups, and classes. How could individuals be fixed and separated? Science helped by developing new technologies of 'biometrics', from phrenology, fingerprinting, and photography to administrative systems of collecting, storing, and using vast amounts of data. In the forefront of this development were scholars and bureaucrats concerned with deviance and criminality (this was the birth of modern criminology). There is a considerable body of research on these nineteenth-century attempts to understand and control the new mass society. Scholars have analyzed the emergence

of new administrative practices and public institutions for describing, identifying, and ordering people – from factory systems to hospitals and prisons. Concepts like 'crowd management', 'crowd control', and 'social governance' have been central here.

There is far less research on how the travel market dealt with the situation and how mass travel and mass movement called for new strategies for handling flows of people. Mass travel required swift flow, not overflow; people were to be handled as customers rather than inmates, state subjects, or patients, in competition with other travel corporations and institutions. Situations in which people or goods piled up, crowded places, and congestions, standstills, and jams had to be dealt with and avoided. How were crowds of customers to be handled in transit spaces like the urban railway station? What happened when strangers with different cultural and social backgrounds were confronted with the necessity of dealing with one another? Managing vast numbers of travelers called for new logistics, services, and infrastructures, from ticket desks and timetables to waiting-rooms and hotel lobbies. Slowly, new systems for mass travel emerged. As JoAnne Yates (1993) and others have shown, it was the new railroad companies that pioneered systems of 'big management' in the nineteenth century, having to develop devices, routines, and skills for handling loads of information and coordination of large-scale logistics, from the use of telegraph, new filing systems, timetables, schedules, forms, and systems for communication inside the organization and with travelers. Many of these innovations and systems were exported to other fields of business.

Our modern transit systems are thus the result of a long process of experimenting and innovating – of trial and error. Architects, planners, engineers, and entrepreneurs all contributed to the organization of transit systems by road, rail, sea, and later air.

New infrastructures

One way of understanding these challenges is to look at the making of big urban railway stations. Not only was this the site of the development and organization of many innovations in mass transit; the station itself became the symbol of flows and overflows, bustling crowds, and the challenges of navigating in a sea of strangers. In 1918, Russian artist Malevich asked if architects really understood that a railway station is 'a door, a tunnel, the nervous pulse of trembling, a town's breathing, a living vein, a quivering heart' (Malevich, 1918/2009: 262).

The huge Copenhagen Central Station, completed in 1911, provides a good example of this historical process and a new transit system. Yet, as Danish novelist Pontoppidan described, the station could be overwhelming to a country vicar arriving by train in Copenhagen in 1912:

> With his carpet bag in one hand and umbrella in the other hand he followed the stream up the stairs and into the hall, where the white sea of light made him open his eyes wide. Shyly he contemplated the sumptuously decorated room, thinking that it was probably larger and costlier than any church in the country. (Quoted after Madsen, 1996: 305)

The vicar hastens out of the station and is again overwhelmed – this time by the intensity of the city, which he hasn't seen since his student days:

> [T]he crowds on the sidewalks, the long rows of trams moving with the pace of trains and belching forth sulphurous blue sparks from the wheels, the swarm of driving machines flying like giant beetles with blood-red eyes, this pandemonium of horns and peals of bells like in a market place – is this really Copenhagen? (Quoted after Madsen, 1996: 305)

'But this is Hell,' mumbles the vicar, stumbling through the crowds as a pimp approaches him.

The vicar's confrontation with urban life is echoed in many other contemporary impressions: disembarking from the rural train, he was thrown into a situation of intense overflow; and in the chaos of the station, all his senses were alerted. His body was pushed and jostled in the crowds; there was hissing steam and belching smoke, loud and unintelligible noises from loudspeakers and shouting porters, strange smells and darting glances from strangers everywhere. Simply too much! In addition to all that, there was the sheer vastness of this place, where one could feel small and lost.

Copenhagen Central Station was a new *zone nerveuse* in 1911, and the architect who designed it realized that. He stated that one of his aims in organizing this transit space was to minimize 'travel nervousness', but that was a difficult task. The station should be a place for the quickening pace of modern mobility, assisting travelers and the growing masses of suburban commuters; but it should also emit messages of reassurance and security. There were a number of details that signaled this impression, from the layout of the building to many small semiotic elements (Löfgren, 2016).

The grand station buildings from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, with their impressive scale and monumental style, were seen as icons of modernity and symbols of national cohesion (Richards and MacKenzie, 2012). But above all, the station had to function as a machine for transit. There was a strong pedagogical dimension here; the station was supposed to work as a training ground for life in a new mass society. Here people should learn to handle the demands of a large-scale movement, finding their way and acquiring correct information. But they also learned to handle what at first was seen as an overexposure to sensations and impressions, as station life was attacking all the senses.

The railway station became a laboratory for dealing with overflow and overload, innovating and institutionalizing systems and routines which were later adopted in urban settings by other transit centers from hotels to airports. The new infrastructures were supposed to provide a smooth flow and help to avoid chaotic overflow – an outcome requiring an efficient and speedy handling of travelers and a routinization and ritualization of the interactions between service personnel and customers.

A steam-powered class society

'Steam is the great democratic power of our age, annihilating the conventional distinctions, differences and social distance between man and man,' wrote Samuel Laing optimistically, after his first steamboat trip from the USA to Europe in 1848 (quoted in Fox, 2003: 199). The new travel technologies were to have revolutionized society and relationships between people.

The migrations and travels between Europe and the USA saw new ways of handling passengers in great numbers. Steam technology created large volumes. By 1905, more than one million migrants had arrived in New York by boat.

A system of departure ports – veritable machines for transit – developed all over Europe. New railway systems transported thousands of emigrants across the continent to harbors like Liverpool, Hamburg, and Le Havre, where block after block of temporary accommodation with sleeping arrangements were built, migrants sleeping in bunk beds – three beds high. But first those who could pay only for the cheapest passage had to be deloused. Clothes and luggage were sterilized while people sat waiting, naked, covering themselves with blankets. When it was time for departure, tickets

had to be controlled, passenger lists checked, and travelers instructed on routines for the voyage (Maxtone-Graham, 1992: 5ff).[3]

Ships could now carry up to 2,000 passengers sharing confined spaces for a week. How should such a vast number of strangers live and interact? To solve this dilemma, steamboat and railway travel turned to the idea of a class system to organize and segregate passengers. The new idea of a threefold class system was borrowed from ongoing discussions of class in early nineteenth-century Britain, with a vertical structure of upper, middle, and lower class (Furbank 1985).

Steamships introduced first class, second class, and steerage. The great majority were steerage passengers cramped together under the deck, with little privacy and few comforts, treated more or less like cattle or cargo. Second-class passengers shared small cabins, and first-class travelers lived in surroundings imitating luxury hotels.

Steam thus brought a new class system to ships and trains. The big ocean liners turned into laboratories for designing and materializing class differences. In what ways should first-class and second-class spaces differ – from the cabin interiors to the dining-rooms? Ship builders, architects, and designers expended great effort and deliberation on the choice of materials, colors, furniture, and art. It was not only a question of degrees of comfort, but also of constructing symbolic systems and special atmospheres (Ericsson, 2005). Mounting criticism about the treatment of steerage passengers, who were seen almost as non-humans, led to the development of a third class, using a simple, Spartan design.

Similar discussions evolved in railway travel. Would the new mass travel create a desired or feared egalitarianism? A Swedish professor, traveling by train in Germany in 1844, described the new steam locomotion as the child of a new and dangerous influence – workers, baronesses, servant girls, trunks, oxen and pigs, all lumped together, all transported to the same destination (see Arvastson, 2008: 127).

Train travel called for even more elaborate class training. Travelers had to learn how to discriminate quickly between classes and find their proper station. Large signs marked the different compartments, and in some cases whole wagon sets were painted in colors denoting the relevant class. As on the steam ships, both compartments and

3 A large-scale technology was developed here and later adopted by concentration camps.

waiting-rooms were designed according to class (in these early stages of train travel, third-class passengers had to use cattle or cargo wagons).

New ways of designing class thus took shape: the better the class, the greater the amount of upholstery, cushions, and drapes. A first-class compartment or cabin could turn into an orgy of velvet and cushions, whereas plain wood and a lack of textiles characterized third-class spaces. Danish writer Peter Freuchen was struck by the rigid divisions when he traveled through the Soviet Union in the years between the two world wars:

> In the restaurant car we, the first-class nobility, were seated at the far end of the carriage, on comfortable upholstered sofas and chairs clad in red velvet. But we took care not to get mixed up with the 'second-class' passengers, who traveled on benches with grey cloth and not as spacious as ours. They, in turn, had to make sure they weren't seen as 'third-class' passengers, who occupied the other end of the restaurant car. They had to make do with wooden benches […] There was also a fourth class in the train. Large families who seemed in no hurry. I watched how their carriages were coupled or uncoupled when there was room for it. It was just plain cargo wagons, where the passengers had to bring something to sit or lie on, often just straw. (Freuchen, 1957: 214; translation OL)

It is fascinating that class was organized all over the world through the use of textiles. (In socialist China, where class symbolism was avoided, the choice turned into 'soft' and 'hard' railway compartments.) Class thus materialized in small details, and people learned to read this language and capture differences in atmospheres. Where do I belong? People were trained in reading the class of their fellow travelers waiting on the platform or walking through the train: a first-class gentleman, a typical third-class passenger. Peter Freuchen was reprimanded for inviting a third-class passenger into his private compartment: one shouldn't mix with plain third-class passengers when traveling first class, he was told (1957: 213). The class system meant that people could pay for the comfort and security of meeting strangers, but strangers of their own class – a sheltering mechanism for those who felt that they belonged to the first or at least second class.

This materialization of class shaped perceptions and judgments of strangers that are still alive today. It was a system capable of handling social differences on a mass scale, organized by the market rather than the state. Radically different ways of sorting people could have evolved, but the three-class model turned out to be

extremely effective. Walking along the main hall of Copenhagen Central today, one passes O'Leary's sports bar. Under the new sign, a message from 1911 carved into the stone wall is still legible: *Waiting Room for 1st & 2nd Class*.

Boarding a Lufthansa flight from Frankfurt to New York, I have to wait patiently as passengers flying First Class, Business Class, and Premium Economy Class embark. They come from a landscape of more exclusive waiting-rooms: First Class, President, Business, and Welcome Lounges. On board, small details and routines signal the differences among these classes. Bigger chairs, different food, drawn curtains. All around the world, airlines are experimenting with different travel classes, based on traditions and strategies evolved by the nineteenth-century innovators.

Talking portraits

The class system trained people to know their station in life and how to categorize others. The competence of reading strangers was something that people had to acquire in order to handle human overflow. What characteristics should one look for in determining the class of the person approaching one in the street, standing next to one in the queue, or sharing a bench?

Questions of identity and identification became important, not least for government institutions and agencies. One way of seeing how this situation changed is by looking at an institution with a varied history – the passport or travel pass, an institution that mirrors important societal changes. The period of globalization toward the end of the nineteenth century was also a period of free movement: one could, like Phileas Fogg, travel around the world without papers or passports in a way that was impossible in earlier and later times. The First World War put an end to a life without passports, which were introduced in Britain in 1915 and in Sweden in 1917. The new rules were a wartime emergency – a temporary arrangement that became institutionalized into a permanent system for monitoring not only transnational movements, but also personal identities. In this instrument, the photo portrait became extremely important.

In many ways it was innovations in police work that paved the way. The history of the passport and other forms of identification reveals the ways in which identification is established by documenting and fixing significant information, deemed necessary for establishing 'who you actually are'. The choice of symbols, data, and elements

comes to mirror ideas about identity in a given cultural and temporal setting (Gulddal and Mortensen, 2004). A crucial part of this process was the constant development of 'biometrics' (literally 'life measurement'), from nineteenth-century body measurements and fingerprinting to later forms, such as DNA, eye scanning, and digitalization.

Authorities had to learn how to select certain details, traits, and elements from overflowing information in order to produce a passport system, the paramount form of identification record. What kind of information should be selected and represented in the passport or its forerunner, the travel pass? As Frances Stonor Saunders (2016: 8) has noted, identification markers and forms are dependent upon existing technologies. The advent of cheap paper in the sixteenth century paved the way for new forms of recording and archiving of personal data.

Early travel passes could contain many different types of information. Before the use of images and the birth of the passport photo, various signs were selected: in the eighteenth century it was facial complexion; in the nineteenth century age, hair, eye color, and nose shape. The passport combined biography and physiognomy, date of birth and birthplace, occupation, religion, and nationality in different and changing ways. Such techniques of 'describable individuality' (Tagg, 1988: 90) had been developed for criminals, the insane, and the outcasts of late nineteenth-century society (more on this topic in Svensson and Wallette, 2012, and Messner, 2014). With the development of photo technology, the face became the focus of attention. By the 1840s, French police had begun to photograph criminals, and in 1888 Police Inspector Alphonse Bertillon created the method of the *portrait parlé*, a photo with a text commentary. The face would tell the truth about a person's identity, it was assumed, and it is from this criminal context that the passport photo developed. As pointed out above, passports became mandatory during the First World War.

Back in the seventeenth century, travel passes might describe a person's clothing, because dress was seen as a stable marker of social position. By the early twentieth century, this was no longer the case. Social mobility and new forms of mass consumption gave rise to frequent complaints about people dressing above or below their social station. Ways of dressing no longer provided a safe reading of a person. Look at the face instead!

For cosmopolitan elites and intellectuals, this was a new nuisance – more state intervention in private life. After all, they were now exposed to procedures that had hitherto been used for the

down-and-out, ordered to produce what looked not unlike a mug shot of a criminal, and categorized in passport terms in order to travel abroad.

The passport thus molded new forms of modern self-reflection and identity construction. How does one describe oneself? How do the authorities squeeze a unique personality into one of their prepared boxes? Does that passport photo really show a likeness? Or an even the more basic question: what is a likeness? (The genre of passport photos rapidly became examples of terrible un-likeness: 'This awful photo is certainly not of me!') The trendsetting British passport demanded not only a photo, but also a list of characteristics, categorized as small, medium, and large. People were now blue-eyed or brown-eyed, blond- or black-haired, with straight or crooked noses, and fresh or ruddy complexions. A sarcastic letter to *The Times* in 1915 voiced the resentment felt by many:

> Sir,
> A little light might be shed, with advantage, upon the highhanded methods of the Passport Department at the Foreign Office. On the form provided for the purpose I described my face as 'intelligent'. Instead of finding this characterization entered, I have received a passport on which some official utterly unknown to me has taken upon himself to call my face 'oval.'
> Yours very truly,
> Bassett Digby (quoted in Fussell, 1980: 29)

People now acquired a passport identity, which was later to be reproduced in such other forms as *cartes d'identité* and driving licenses. Not only could one be troubled by discrepancies of self-definition and passport image; travelers now had to live up to their passport identity in order to prove their real identity.

Stefan Zweig belonged to the traveling generation that experienced these drastic transformations. He remembered his easy travels before the First World War: 'one embarked and alighted without questioning or being questioned […] frontiers were nothing but symbolic lines which one crossed with as little thought as one crosses the Meridian of Greenwich' (Saunders, 2016: 8). Zweig had happily traveled across continents without a passport in earlier times, but this changed drastically in the interwar years. In 1939 encounters with officialdom multiplied beyond measure, and travel required a proliferation of identity cards, visas, tickets, invitations, copies of fingerprints, and health certificates. The more proof of their identity people had to carry around with them, the less they felt like themselves – or like

anyone at all, for that matter. The official externalization of identity meant the elimination of the interior self; Zweig had *bureauphobie*, as he called it (Prochnik, 2014: 355). Another result of this institutionalization of identity and citizenship was the emergence of 'the paperless' – people without standard identity documents.

The history of the passport illustrates the development of new forms of monitoring, controlling, and identifying individuals in a sea of strangers. It was not a simple steamrolling process of increased control and supervision. The history of identification is a patchwork system, showing great variation. The nation state has often been relatively unsystematic in developing systems of surveillance and identification, leaving this process to commercial actors like banks and other organizations, as Edward Higgs (2011) has shown. The increased attention to systems of identification also tended to create new overloads of administrative procedures.

Skills of social navigation

Problems of identification were not merely a state concern, of course. Mass travel and urban growth called for new social competences and sensibilities, and transit places like Copenhagen Central Station became some of the training-grounds. Here people learned to handle crowds, stand in line, absorb information at accelerating speeds, read signs and timetables, and listen to loudspeakers. In Copenhagen there is a saying about those who have not yet become street-smart and are identified as unsophisticated country bumpkins: 'Did you arrive on the four o'clock train?' One could tell the newcomers by their clumsy body movements, their gawping gazes, and their poorly masked amazement. Alighting from the train in Copenhagen, they experienced the sensory shocks of new sounds, smells, smoke, and bustling crowds. Simply too much! And they had so much to learn.

There was, for example, the collective choreography of moving in crowds, with its coordination of bodies and a competence of quick glances, body signals, and swift movements. In the early stages of railway life, there were handbooks written about crowd etiquette. 'When many travelers gather, a so-called "queue" has to be formed', a mid-nineteenth-century Swedish instruction booklet states. The novel term was taken from the French, sometimes seen as the innovators of this new social form (see Ehn and Löfgren, 2010).

A British handbook from 1862 dealt with the handling of strangers in the confined space of the train compartment: 'In going through a tunnel it is always well to have the hands and arms ready disposed

for defence, so that in an event of an attack, the travellers may be instantly beaten back or restrained' (quoted in Smullen, 1968: 57). In the new compartmentalized train life, one could feel both isolated and exposed: 'We are pressed together in a compartment and are then violently pushed apart again. Who can be content with such treatment?' an author complained in 1865 (quoted in Löfgren, 2008).

The history of railway travel can be read as a history of learning to organize and differentiate social classes, of developing survival skills in a new mass society in which people in close contact with strangers must learn to appraise them. New travelers learned to identify and judge the appearance of passing strangers and create social distinctions. Who was a friend and who was a foe? Interesting or uninteresting? An equal or not? Small details in dress, body language, and speech became important. Dress became increasingly problematic, as old traditions of class-based dressing gave way to new consumer patterns. People started to dress up and created an uncertainty about identity. Was this a real gentleman or just a dressed-up working-class boy, a proper lady or a demi-monde? Several historians have described how these new urban skills were developed, a case in point being Mikkel Thelle's (2013) study of Copenhagen street-life around 1900. A new group of specialists emerged who were good at this type of identification and reading of strangers – from the new plain-clothes police detectives to journalists who specialized in describing 'new urban types' and how they could be identified (more on these topics in Fritzsche, 1996, and Andersson, 2012).

In such urban settings as the street, train compartments, or waiting areas, techniques for keeping social distance from or making contact with strangers were developed – competences that are now taken for granted and thus have become tacit; people are trained to check each other out secretly, learn how to find shelter behind a newspaper or a smartphone screen, or pretend to be asleep. But for the pioneer generations of mass travel, all this social etiquette and all these new skills had to be experimented with and only slowly turned into routines and reflexes.

People gradually adjusted to the new transport system; but as new groups joined the world of railway travel, there were constant reminders of the skills needed for mass transport. Seasoned commuters found themselves on the platform next to migrants who had embarked on the journey of their lives, leaving home and familiar surroundings to travel across continents or to the big city. They were clinging to bags and suitcases containing their most precious possessions, filled

with the anxiety or the excitement of breaking up and leaving home. At Liverpool Station in 1896, John Pendleton observed the many migrants bound for the USA: 'On the platforms may be found groups of Germans, Swedes, Poles, of men, women and children of nearly every European nationality, surrounding curious luggage, and, in railway porters' opinion, "jabbering a lot of nice lingo"' (quoted in Richards and MacKenzie, 2012: 147).

In US railway stations, local commuters looked with curiosity, condescension, and pity at these strange newcomers – women in peculiar, old-fashioned costumes, looking 'faded, wan and anxious', 'swarthy men with bare arms'. Should migrants not be separated from other travelers (Richards and MacKenzie, 2012: 148)?

The competence of reading strangers was based on learning to catch impressions swiftly and sending out the right signals in this sea of strangers. In the city one could not stare; rather one must employ a swift glance, which had to be perfected. People learned to capture a new situation, to read an approaching stranger, to steal a glance or hide their curiosity, while simultaneously communicating with tiny gestures and body movements. A quick shrug, a turning hand, a non-committal smile or frown.

Sociologist Georg Simmel was among those who observed these new urban skills. He also pointed to the changing sensory profiles of perceptions. In traditional small-town settings, listening and oral communication formed a key part of street-life orientation; in the more anonymous cities, he argued, the visual gained precedence, from the glance to the gaze (Frisby and Featherstone, 1997). Among the coping skills allowing navigation in crowds were techniques of handling an overflow of sensations, filtering and ignoring impressions, diverting attention, cloaking or hiding curiosity, but also insulating oneself, keeping one's distance when in forced proximity.

Much of the debate on urban overflows since Simmel's days tends to present overflows as a problem, pointing to their negative side: alienation, anonymity, standardization, automatization, and commercialization – not only of institutions and public spaces, but also of human relations. A typical example from the late nineteenth century may illustrate this notion. Observers talked about how 'the very rhythm and pace of life differed in ways that were as unsettling as they were difficult to define'. There was anxious talk of 'the impersonality and bustle of urban existence, the lack of human warmth. The heedless jostlings of the free-floating human atoms that endlessly surged through the streets' (Boyer, 1978: 4).

Such statements belong to a repetitive genre which misses the favorable potentials. Moving in a sea of strangers also creates new possibilities and liberties. People can use the anonymity to re-invent themselves, to start play-acting, feeling free of constraints. The new mobility had strong liberating elements.

From 1911 to 2015

What are the lessons from comparing two mass-travel situations a century apart? Back in 1911, the train stations in Malmö and Copenhagen were examples of new transit machines, slowly improving ways of promoting flows and battling overflows. They were training-grounds for new generations of travelers, commuters, and migrants.

Comparing 1911 and 2015, it is important to remember that transit hubs like these have experienced many waves of migration. In the early twentieth century, Malmö Station was a node of emigration. Rural Swedes disembarked from the train to take the ferry to Copenhagen in search of work in Denmark or, if they could afford it, a passage to North America. In Copenhagen, they constituted a new ethnic group often seen by authorities as a problematic overflow. The exodus of migrants led to Swedish debates about introducing some kind of new passport system in this passport-free era. The idea was to control not entry to Sweden but exit from Sweden. How could Swedes be prevented from leaving their country without checking if they had avoided military conscription, tax payments, or family responsibilities? Outflow rather than inflow was the problem.

A railway station like Copenhagen Central has also been shaped by fluctuations in migration. In the 1970s, it was turned into a meeting-place for young Turkish labor migrants. They had arrived at the station in search of work in Denmark, and once settled, they returned here in the evenings, flocking by the hundreds to chat and exchange news with fellow expatriates. Commuters complained that they seemed to be taking over the station.

As the influx of asylum seekers and migrants expanded rapidly in 2015, there was talk of overflow problems on several levels. Even with their well-established systems of ticketing, identity controls, and surveillance, the smooth transit machines handling travel flows no longer worked. Air travel was rarely an option for refugees. They had to return to improvised ways of travel and border crossings. How to organize a journey from Syria or Libya to Scandinavia or Germany? A constantly shifting landscape of travel logistics and

routes emerged, as they resorted to traditional ways of traveling. Refugee accounts are rife with the ways in which travel was planned and executed, with constant changes of transportation. People had to resort to old, leaking vessels or inflated rafts, hide in freight cars, and trudge over fields, along country roads, or across mountain country in order to find ways to cross into Europe and over European borders. There was a constant search for an alternative route, for places to sleep, get a hot meal, charge the smartphone, or hide from controls. EU rules made it necessary to avoid registration until reaching the country in which the refugee was seeking asylum. People had to develop skills for blending in, looking like a 'normal' local train passenger, avoiding attention, learning to haggle with smugglers, or dealing with immigration officers.

Some advice from the nineteenth century turned out to be of use again. In 1862, the handbook advice for rail travelers was to seek refuge behind a newspaper in order to avoid contact with strangers. In 2015, some refugees taking the train through Europe bought local newspapers at each border crossing, hiding behind *Le Monde* through France and *Frankfurter Allgemeine* through Germany, trying to pass as locals (Kingsley 2016: 169).

Travel information was circulated and shared in many forms. It might be a piece of paper with a scribbled travel route: find a smuggler in this coastal Turkish town; get a place in a boat across to Greece; walk, find a train, or talk to a taxi driver in this small border town to take you between two points. Avoid the following border passages …

Back in the nineteenth century, pioneer rail travelers learned to navigate with the help of travel guidebooks. For the new migrants, the Internet became crucial. People published their travel experiences and gave advice on social media, on Facebook, and in WhatsApp groups, thus making many migrants less dependent on the information of smugglers. One example was 'The safe and free route to asylum for Syrians', which contained not only travel routes and detailed GPS instructions about border crossings, but also hints on how to dress, pack a bag, and handle officials. Patrick Kingsley (2016: 188) called it 'a Baedeker for the refugee era'.

Smartphones became the main organizing tool for this new kind of mass travel. People could risk losing everything they had brought with them, but not their phones. Through them, they were constantly updated about routes, obstacles, changing national immigration policies, and new strategies to keep moving. Kinship networks were activated to find a place to sleep or help with practicalities. When

the phone went dead, one was lost. Information gathering was also done by circulating in transit spaces and temporary refugee camps, listening to and sharing an overflow of rumors, asking for news or advice on how to travel further. Who has the most reliable and updated information? For refugee smugglers, such information was a vital market asset.

In these new travelscapes, there were no longer any well-organized and secure transit centers, like airports, railway stations, or bus depots. Railway stations could be transformed into something else overnight. Mussolini's marble monument, the central station of Milan, became a strategic hub for migrants working their way northward. Charlotte McDonald-Gibson (2016: 188) describes the transformation:

> For the tens of thousands of refugees passing through the capacious halls, it is a place of respite from a grueling journey, a pause in their game of cat-and-mouse with Europe's police forces. Mothers nurse babies on the marble staircases. Men gather for furtive cigarettes to share stories of how to best dodge the police, border guards and immigration. Women sit in filthy clothes underneath Dolce & Gabana billboards emblazoned with skinny models draped in gold and silk.

When Hungary closed its border, thousands of refugees were stranded at Kelesti, the grand Budapest railway station, which was turned into a densely populated temporary refugee camp of day-to-day survival.

During 2015, improvised transit centers emerged everywhere. Tourist islands like Lampedusa and Lesbos, the 'Jungle' in Calais, small border villages in Austria or Passau (called the Lampedusa of Germany) all became sites where overflow had to be handled with constant improvisation, makeshift arrangements, tents, sheds, volunteers (Rolshoven and Schlör, 2016).

But the flow of refugees and asylum seekers in 2015 was not only about inventing new travel routes, mainly aiming for Northern Europe; there was also the problem of papers, passports, identity cards, and visas. In the life of refugees, the trade in false identity papers has a long tradition. How much does it cost for a passport or a fake identity card? Could a Greek passport get one into Germany or an Italian identity card into Switzerland? As with constant worries about finding new travel routes, people constantly had to keep informed about changes in this volatile market of forged papers – a market in which passports and identity cards are ranked by prestige and potential, but also by the ease with which they can be forged (Saunders, 2016: 8). People's appearances also matter; a fake identity

document is cheaper to produce for migrants with fairer skin, who can more easily pass for Europeans (McDonald-Gibson 2016: 161).

With the flow of refugees and migrants, there was an overflow of the paperless or 'undocumented', which challenged national systems of identity controls. Some years earlier, the idea was often to destroy one's own identity papers before crossing the border, hoping for better chances of asylum; but as European rules and border controls changed, this was no longer a good option.

In discussions about the overflow of refugees, one of the main problems was seen as losing control over the identification process. Undocumented visitors were perceived as a threat, creating a parallel society within the nation. Different strategies of gaining control or handling the paperless were improvised in European countries. Again, the national differences in trying to handle this are striking. Take, for example, the problem of dealing with the growing number of unaccompanied minors entering Europe. Different asylum rules applied to minors under 18 years of age, which led to the creation of age checks; but they were developed in different ways in different European states (Collins, 2017).

Refugee travel also developed informal class systems. Ivaylo Ditchev, writing about traveling in 1990s war-torn Balkans, noted how closely forms of mobility interact with social hierarchy. The Mercedes with grey-toned windows was waved across quickly by the border guards, whereas the battered van next in line was scrutinized. Lorry drivers waited in long queues, and the suitcase traders traveling by bus had to get out and line up for border inspection. At the bottom of the transport hierarchy were the illegal immigrants avoiding the checkpoint and crossing over the mountains, led by expensive local guides (Morley, 2011: 753).

In a similar manner, the kind of smuggler services and risk-taking available depended on how much the refugee could pay for transport, guidance, and information. The first-class option required the ability to pay for good fake identity documents and trying to catch a regular flight. There were discussions about the strictness of airport control: Was it easier to get out of Crete than Athens? And make sure never to board a plane first; wait for five others to enter before you do. There were price lists for other options: sharing a taxi, taking a train, and hiding in a van or being walked across the border.

For immigrants and refugees, border situations may become a strong organizing life experience. Here their position and future in the nation they are trying to enter will be defined and their

personalities judged: are they wanted or unwanted, seen as needy, trustworthy applicants or as devious swindlers? Generations of travelers have had this experience in various ways. Jews trying to get out of Germany in the 1930s found themselves walking from consulate to consulate trying to get a passage out. What were the chances of a ticket to the USA, Argentina, or Sweden? Rumors and information were constantly circulating about problems and possibilities. Back in the 1990s, Slavenka Draculič described the feeling of constant border humiliation from the perspective of an Eastern European. Is this person just a tourist or a visitor, or is she trying to get in on a false pretext? 'If you ever have been subjected to these suspicious glances, you never forget them; you can spot them at a long distance' (Draculič, 1996: 21).

Standing in the line at Malmö Station in 2015, I am reminded of the Nigerian art curator Okwui Enwezor (1996: 65), who described his experience of customs control at Charles de Gaulle Airport where he arrived surrounded by other Third World migrants, back in the 1990s:

> I hate being one of these people: the men and the women with their bundles, their world and dreams contained in bags and boxes long out of fashion. Even more, I loathe the pawing fingers of the coarse young French officer at Charles De Gaulle, his rudeness and sullen manner, his angry inferiority complex.

Okwui Enwezor was no longer a person or an ordinary traveler, but a problem.

In mass travel, each new generation or group faces the necessity of learning the required skills and competences for navigating in a sea of strangers. The overflow of rural migrants to growing cities in the early railway age of the nineteenth century was described in terms of ill-dressed masses speaking unintelligible dialects and lacking urban sophistication. They made the painful experience of acquiring navigation skills in the new alien settings which they encountered. Looking at the travel experiences of different generations of migrants a century later, it is evident how quickly conditions can change. Traveling through Europe as a refugee during the 1990s, the early 2000s, or in 2015 presented different challenges and possibilities.[4] Stable routines, well-known infrastructures, rules of interaction,

4 This becomes evident if one compares migrants' accounts from, for example, the exodus during the Yugoslavian wars in the early 1990s (see Mertus et al., 1997) with experiences from the early 2000s or 2015.

slowly built up over decades, could no longer be taken for granted in 2015. Familiar landscapes of mobility are being transformed, actors turn unpredictable, spaces are distorted, and competences become irrelevant, knowledge unreliable. People must tackle perceptions of themselves as an alien mass of intruders, unwanted visitors – problems not persons. The overflow of 2015 caused bewilderment and uncertainties, but also creative improvisation pursuing new routines and tools of mobility and social navigation, just as the pioneers of mass travel had once done.

4
Too much happens in the workplace

Karolina J. Dudek

In his fascinating book *Cubed: A secret history of the workplace* (2014), Nikil Saval described how workplaces have changed since the beginning of the twentieth century. With the rise of the clerks' tribe, they have in fact changed a great deal. As one of the characters in the US film *Office space* (1999) expressed it: 'Human beings were not meant to sit in little cubicles staring at computer screens all day' (quoted in Saval, 2014: 3). And yet they do.

Juriaan van Meel (2000: 25–53) has provided a comparison between European and US offices, demonstrating that the history of the office is complex and that discrepancies can be traced through local histories, as the same concepts were employed differently in various contexts. One can identify dominating trends, however.

Over the past 100-plus years, various types of overflows have had to be dealt with, but some problems seem to persist. At the end of the nineteenth century, the expansion of office work occurred so quickly and engaged so many new workers that there was no time to develop new ways of organizing space (Saval, 2014: 43). By the turn of the century, the need for new arrangements was extremely urgent. At that point Frederic Taylor introduced scientific management, which involved the division of tasks into smaller, more discrete activities and the subordination of employees under the control of a manager. In the first offices, such as the ones in the often-mentioned Larkin Building, desks were organized along corridors like a factory production line, and work was reduced to simple, repeatable activities (Saval, 2014: 66–71). There was no room for thinking or creativity, as all tasks were thoroughly predesigned. Managers expected speed and efficiency. There could be no gossiping or socializing in the workplace. The idea behind

the creation of the open-plan office, where the manager could see everyone, was discipline and focused work. Supplying only relatively (at least by current standards) small social areas where employees could rest or develop a sense of camaraderie with their coworkers also made it easier for managers to monitor the employees' private use of time. Employees with nowhere to hide from the manager were easier to control, and managerial control was considered essential.

In the 1950s and 1960s, communication became crucial, and so-called 'landscaped offices' and 'Action Offices' became the dominant architectural model. The change of office settings was dramatic, a response to the rapid increase of knowledge work that had to be performed: fewer tasks based on routine and more tasks requiring judgment (Saval, 2014: 210). Spacious offices with thick carpets, flowers, and abundance – no doors, no walls, and few partitions – created an environment that produced non-hierarchical and human-centered space for organizational social life and reflected the end of Taylorism. It seemed chaotic and unplanned, but there was more planning behind the messy arrangements than there had been with Taylor's orderly array of desks (Saval, 2014: 202). Invisible lines separated clusters of activities and created paths of workflow. Action Office was a flexible combination of adjustable furniture and mobile walls, allowing the components to be arranged as desired. But these offices paved the way for the cubicles of the 1970s and 1980s, which were caricatures of the Action Office – crowded, generic, small, half-enclosed spaces where one could barely move.

'For a long time the norms and conventions of office design remained as stable as the simple technology of the typewriter and the straightforward habits and behaviour of clerical organisations', wrote Francis Duffy (2001: 324). Until the last decade, little had changed. The dominant model was a combination of open-plan offices and closed offices (individual and team rooms and conference rooms). The workplace design was a result of the domination of a full-time type of employment – employment on a full-time basis at the company for which the work was done. The number of planned workstations simply equaled the number of full-time equivalents (FTEs) – the equivalent of one person working full time. All data were available in the Human Resources (HR; previously called personnel) department. People spent most of their time at their workstations, where their computer and all their belongings were kept.

But the workplace has recently faced a silent revolution. Nothing described here is still certain. The number of desks no longer equals the number of FTEs, and mobile laptops travel around the office

with employees, as the time they spend at their desks is diminishing rapidly. Office planning and space management used to be much easier than it is now, and offices are changing rapidly: old premises are being rearranged and new ones built according to new rules.

As an organization researcher who focuses on the way modern workplaces are created and transformed, I have had many opportunities not only to follow the events as they evolve and to observe actors that appear front stage, but also – to use a Goffmanian metaphor – to explore what happens backstage. On one occasion, during an informal business meeting, a director of the administration department in a multinational organization operating in the financial sector confided in the people gathered for lunch about a problem that the company was facing. It was necessary to move its employees from Building A to one or two other premises because the lease agreement on Building A was about to expire.

The way the director framed the story was telling, and it opened my eyes to a completely new aspect of workplace organization. Where did the problem lie? In what follows, I answer this question and discuss the nature of similar problems in a wide range of organizations. The interpretative framework is the concept of 'overflow' and 'overflow management' (Czarniawska and Löfgren, 2012, 2013), as the modern workplace is facing the challenge of an overflow of people, activities, machines, and other things. My goal is to explain how these overflows change the modern workplace and how organizations attempt to deal with these overflows by generating new coping strategies. My starting-points are the questions posed by Barbara Czarniawska and Orvar Löfgren (2012: 2): 'What is overflowing? According to whom? Is it desirable or threatening, and if so, to whom?' Answering these questions, I discuss new workplace concepts and control systems.

Fieldwork

In this chapter, I analyze fieldwork material that I collected in Poland, as both a researcher and a consultant. The approaches that I have taken in these two circumstances differ somewhat, but they have much in common as well.

As a consultant, I take part in architectural projects and serve as a liaison officer between the business and the architects. I conduct the qualitative part of the research and coordinate the research process. The main product of my work is then a brief organizational ethnography, which becomes part of a workplace strategy report.

The need for such a description emerged from my repeated observation that organizations produce documents like organizational charts and job descriptions, but that they usually describe a situation that is fundamentally different from the way organizations actually work (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Becker, 2004: 15). What I do is a quick description, in the positive sense of the word: my task is to sketch the nitty-gritty of how an organization works. I provide answers to questions such as: What do different departments do? What are the daily routines? Which processes occur quarterly or annually? What are the spatial requirements for different teams?

To build this knowledge base, I usually conduct extensive interviews and focus groups, followed by workshops during which employees act as architects and designers and plan their part of the office. Occasionally, I also perform a 'visual audit' (visual ethnography), inspired by visual anthropology techniques (Strangleman, 2014: 255), to build an understanding of how business processes and spatial practices are materialized in the workplace. In other words, I focus on temporary forms of spatial organization created by the flow of things, and on space as a means of visual communication. I then write descriptions with recommendations for each department, which enumerate the types of spaces that a department needs and suggest how to organize the workstations. Work processes are translated into architectural design requirements, types of furniture, and technology facilities. I became a consultant after one of my interviewees asked me to help in a project.[1] In this way, I gradually became involved in the research conducted for the interviewee's company's clients and subsequently other companies as a freelance researcher, adapting my scholarly methods to the needs of business. In the workshops that I conduct, I refer to theoretical notions that have formed the groundwork of my scholarly research, including *boundary objects* (Star and Griesemer, 1989), *situated knowledge* (Resnick et al., 1997), and *linguistic artifacts*, such as labels, metaphors, and platitudes (Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges, 1988).

1 As a part of my research project 'Creating Office Space', financed by the National Science Center in Poland (decision number: DEC-2011/03/N/HS6/04945), I have conducted interviews with many specialists involved in planning and arranging workplaces: architects, designers, project managers, and furniture suppliers. All quotes from interviews cited in this chapter marked [R] are excerpts from interviews conducted as part of this research that I have translated from Polish.

As a scholar, I am exempted from the need to deliver a description of 'how things should be' and am primarily interested in sensemaking (Weick, 1995). My research focuses on the way discourses are translated into artefacts (forms of visual inspiration, sketches, space plans, and visualizations) and on the processes that lead to the creation of offices. I investigate how the process of creating office space is enabled and constrained by various factors, and how multidisciplinary teams communicate. My studies encompass the role of technology as well – in the workplace, in managing people, and in manufacturing control and discipline (see also Czarniawska, 2008: 50–52).

A workplace, I came to understand, is not only a space where technology may be installed, but also a hybrid: an aggregate comprising humans, space, furniture, and machines. From my perspective, the designing process begins with a narrative during which the company's CEO or board of directors meets the architects, telling them how they envision the office (Dudek, 2017). Their narrative rarely begins with a vision, however. More often it starts with a history of the company, which serves as a backdrop for a more detailed description of how the company operates at present. The reason that the workplace requires a rearrangement becomes the pivotal point. Later, in the process of arranging a new office, such stories become translated into visual inspiration, sketches, space plans, and a design concept. Organizational structure and business processes are also translated into diagrams and descriptions in workplace strategy reports, which in turn are translated into a space budget (a budget in which the total number of square meters is divided into various types of workplace areas) and space plans, into which various norms are also inscribed.

Enter the overflow

In most cases, the need to rearrange the office is framed as anything but the need to deal with overflow. Just as managers see challenges rather than facing problems, 'overflow' is not one of their linguistic devices. Rather, they look for 'opportunities for organizing in a more effective and flexible manner'. Franck Cochoy explained it boldly:

> In most business cases, 'management' and 'overflow' are antithetical notions. Management is about producing and channeling flows – not overflows. If overflow occurs, the 'over' means that management has failed to some extent to accomplish its distinctive mission of flow

> generation and control. Management is about framing the world, and overflows challenge managerial frames and underline their limits (Callon, 1998). Once the overflow occurs, of course, a new managerial task begins: overflow channeling and/or reduction. (Cochoy, 2012: 52)

When one adopts the managerial perspective, the flow of things, tasks, and people in the office indeed creates 'opportunities for organizing in a more effective and flexible manner', even if researchers refer to such instances of flow as overflows that call for channeling and/or reduction. In the following examples that I analyze, various methods of dealing with overflows have been adopted. Some of these methods involve the application of management tools in order to make these flows visible and countable and, as a result, controllable.

What flows, overflows

I now return to my starting-point. Both in Building A and on other premises, employees of the company only constituted a portion of those who worked there. The HR department could count the FTEs on the payroll, but there were also trainees and interns, consultants and auditors, self-employed specialists, and other people employed by temporary staffing agencies. Thus, the FTE index did not reflect the company's spatial needs. In principle, all employees were given cards that allowed them to enter the office. It was not the company that issued these cards, however, but the building administrator, who did not collect any data apart from first names and surnames and was unable to analyze the dates of entrance and departure. 'How do we count how many desks will be needed?' was a question the director could not answer, though it is a common question asked in many organizations. She simply did not know how many workstations were occupied in the company offices, if there was enough space, and whether it was possible to relocate the employees to other buildings. The flow of people appeared as an overflow because the desks could not be calculated.

An overflow of people and profound changes in the way people work generate an overflow of activities. People not only work individually at their desks; they make calls using mobile telephones and Skype, meet for teleconferences in conference rooms, join small groups for ad hoc arrangements, discuss and brainstorm in small and large groups, join large meetings for strategic planning for three hours or interdisciplinary project groups for 10 days, and print and scan documents. New managerial fashions or concepts of managing

people like Agile with its Scrum methodology[2] bring greater diversity and unpredictability to organizational life: distributed knowledge in organizations, learning on the job, or acquiring information from various people become extremely important, as does reacting to problems and situations for which there are no guidelines or procedures. Thus cooperation, discussion, and brainstorming become at least as frequent as individual work.

Imagine an open-plan office with conference rooms, and add an IT specialist. Let's say she works in a unit that provides applications for online stores, and her job consists of testing business applications. She works in an international environment and spends half her time at her desk via Skype – gathering information, explaining sophisticated issues, or participating in webinars. On average, 20% of her time is dedicated to cooperating with office colleagues during formal and informal meetings; only 30% of her time in the office does she spend working individually. Let's also assume that her colleagues' work styles are similar, so when she is trying to focus on a report, the colleague sitting next to her is discussing the recent update in the system on Skype with team members working outside the office. Imagine the amount of noise in that part of the office. It is like in a call center, where everyone has earphones and talks into a microphone. But these IT specialists do not perform repetitive tasks described in a prewritten script; they must concentrate on highly demanding issues, answer sophisticated questions, and write code. Imagine how difficult it is to focus and how drained they feel at the end of the day.

Now think of a situation when a problem arises that the IT specialist cannot tackle alone. She urgently needs help, because this issue cannot wait until tomorrow. All the conference rooms are already booked for the day. Apart from everyday meetings, there are colocations with team members from another country, and some of the conference rooms are fully booked for the whole week. The office kitchen is too small for them to meet as a group of four with their laptops and flipchart. And there are no sockets in the kitchen that would allow them to access a database on the Intranet, which

2 Agile is an adaptive, evolutionary, and flexible approach to software development. It advocates early delivery, continuous improvement, and management that involve flexible responses to issues that emerge during the process. Scrum is an iterative and incremental Agile software development framework. The term 'scrum' is borrowed from rugby, where it is a method of restarting play. Management ideas often borrow terms from the vocabulary of sport.

they need in order to discuss the problem and find a solution. What should they do?

Today's workplace must encompass a great many different activities. The flow of tasks is seen as an overflow when there is not enough space to perform the activities, when the space is not properly arranged, or when the work becomes toil that leaves the employees exhausted.

With the overflow of people and the overflow of activities comes the overflow of things: from laptops and docking stations to vending machines, and enormous numbers of other things, from product samples to stacks of papers. A director of a company in a fast-moving consumer-goods branch told me about a huge space problem in their marketing department. The employees kept samples of products and catalogues under their desks, because all other available storage places were fully utilized. The employees claimed that they could not go around the office looking for a sample they needed – it had to be close at hand. Because so many samples were kept in such a messy condition, ants appeared in the office. The director mentioned a practical joke that was played on one of the employees. His desk was carefully dismantled and temporarily removed. Left was a pile shaped in the form of the desk, made of different things that he kept in boxes.

In another company, the managing director went out of the office during an interview, pointed to a shelf in front of the door, and shouted angrily: 'This drives me crazy!' Various objects were randomly cramped on the shelf; actually, the whole office was a mess. The core product of the company was business services that involved printing and preparing special packages. Unused items were stored in different parts of the office because they could be needed later. The director asked if I knew that they even had cabinets brought from a previous location and never opened, because the keys were lost. As the interviewer, I couldn't help but think that the message was: 'We have lost control over things that we keep.'

Control over things is often lost in production companies that display their products within their offices or organizations and must process many documents. One of the architects I talked to commented on the visual mess in a client's office. The company produced toys and tried to arrange a display in the office:

> In this company, slackness and negligence must have been allowed, because there were many toys scattered everywhere. […] Besides, they had no idea about how to arrange all those boxes or toys on the walls. There were some hanging glass shelves, but everything

> was completely chaotic, and there was no organizing framework. And I do not want to use the word 'messy', but that's just how it was: everything was so crammed. All this has to be arranged; it must be consistent. I have devised a shelf system for them: they can move these shelves, depending on the size of the box with the toy. […] And I suggested that these displays should be rearranged every month, for example, or every quarter. [R]

Another architect told me that he almost cried after the people moved into the office he had designed. They brought in an enormous number of things. Almost everyone brought a pot with a flower, he said, and managed to create a visual mess within the first week.

People decorate their workstations with plants, family photos, toys, mascots, mugs, plates, and travel souvenirs. They hang printed memes, comic strips, crosses, and portraits of Pope John Paul II, paintings, film posters, posters with animals, naked women, male film stars with naked chests and unzipped jeans: in other words, *sacrum* and *profanum*.

A search for office images in a stock photography bank would yield photographs of neat offices, where clean furniture occupies an otherwise empty space. No mascots, family photographs, ferns, printed or handwritten way-finding signs, piles of documents in binders and boxes scattered on the floor or falling from shelves. The reality as seen by the researcher (me) and described by interlocutors is far from the reality of stock photography's generic offices. It is messy and chaotic or cozy and creative, depending on who is looking. 'My order may be your mess,' Orvar Löfgren (2017: 1) reminded his readers: 'Differences of class, gender, ethnicity and generation are at work here. The production of disorder is a cultural practice, mirroring changing ideas about order, value and taxonomies'. There may be hidden order in the office chaos. Or office mess may be a result of failed order when an organizing scheme stops working for some reason (Abrahamson and Freedman, 2006: 71).

The flow of things becomes an overflow, however, when things cannot be found or when nobody is keeping track of what is stored where, when things create a visual mess that is described as overwhelming, or when insects appear.

Coping with overflow: apps, diagrams, and the activity-based workplace

Managers are trying to handle and control the overflow of people, activities, and things in many ways. A variety of managerial concepts,

management tools, and technological and architectural solutions are used to separate streams of flow – to sort, categorize, count, estimate, and handle. In what follows, I present three ways of channeling and reducing overflow, as Franck Cochoy aptly put it (2012: 52). These are not separate ways, but rather aspects of the same process of coping with overflow. Two of them are undertaken in order to control the overflow of activities: it is a creation of new types of offices, and the employment of new methods of organizing these activities in time and space. Things are tamed when subordinated to the concept of a 'clean-desk policy' or crammed into archives. All overflows can become flows again when they are controllable by applications in a smart office.

The activity-based workplace: translating tasks into diagrams and desk-sharing

One of the concepts that have a great impact on the way offices are currently organized is the 'activity-based workplace' or 'activity-based working'. This approach to office design can be traced back to the 1990s, when Erik Veldhoen (1995) coined the term, and when Francis Duffy (2001) proposed the new models of space organization. Duffy's models were based on a taxonomy built on two key dimensions: autonomy and interaction (Laing et al., 2004: 21–25). These changes were introduced slowly but were seen as inevitable. As Franklin Becker put it:

> No longer does the way space is designed and allocated presume that most employees come into the office in the morning, go directly to their office, and sit there for most of the rest of the day. Instead, the individual workspace is smaller and more open, reflecting value placed on face-to-face interaction. Designed with a range of distinct types of formal and informal meeting areas, identical conference rooms give way to greater variety of settings in which staff can choose to work. (Becker, 2004: 55)

An activity-based workplace in an office means that there are separate areas dedicated to different activities (see, e.g., Crespi, 2016: 233). During the day, employees no longer sit solely at their desks, but move between different areas in the office designed to support different activities: informal spaces for collaboration and brainstorming; formal spaces for meetings in conference halls; phone booths for telephone calls; a focus room for quiet, 'heads down' work or individual teleconferences; lounge areas; chill-out rooms and games

rooms for relaxation. Some of these rooms need to be booked; others can be used freely whenever they are unoccupied. The idea is to separate activities that involve individual, focused work from those that involve group cooperation, those that involve noise from those that must be performed in silence by highly focused employees. When the overflow of activities is channeled into spatially separate areas, it becomes a controllable flow.

Another means of coping with overflow, which comes in a package with activity-based working, is desk-sharing. People currently spend significant amounts of time away from their workstations, attending meetings, taking training, working at home, and visiting clients or other company sites (Harrison et al., 2004: 21). Desk-sharing means that there are fewer desks than employees and that they must share workstations. One of my interlocutors explained it this way:

> People sit at their desks on an average of 45% of their working time; the rest of the time desks are used passively: people are in meetings, etc. People don't sit at the desks as we suppose they do. So, just compare what people are in fact doing with how space is constructed: 80% of the space is designed for desks and 20% for meeting space. There is a huge dissonance. […] And now it turns out that employees can be divided into three types.[3] We call those who sit at their desks 'anchors'. 'Networkers' work inside the office but not at their desks. And the last group, the 'nomads', are people who travel a lot; they are often outside the office. And it turns out that you can introduce an office-sharing system for this last group. [R]

My interviewee's company performed space-utilization studies in clients' offices. They selected departments in which there was a significant number of nomads and provided a universal consulting recommendation: introduce desk-sharing in these departments, and the space-utilization costs will go down. This business-consulting service, brilliant in its simplicity, provided the same off-the-shelf generic solutions for all clients, regardless of the industry or the tasks that their employees performed, and it is now being used as

3 The inspiration for this typology of employees was most probably an article by Catherine Greene and Jeremy Myerson on types of knowledge workers, with regard to their mobility and work styles (Greene and Myerson, 2011). Greene and Myerson's qualitative research focused on types of interactions within offices, and they concluded that knowledge workers can be divided into four groups: two with low mobility (anchors, connectors) and two with high mobility (gatherers, navigators). My interviewee connected the last two types under the unifying term 'nomads'.

a universal overflow-management tool. Implementation of activity-based working associated with the introduction of desk-sharing renders obsolete or at least less dramatic the director's question I cited earlier: 'How do we count how many desks will be needed?'

The activity-based workplace is yet another management fad. As Czarniawska (2005) has noted, organizations are subordinated to fashions, just as clothes shops are. Innovations are introduced for various reasons, however. In Amsterdam, for example, activity-based working may be a way of reducing high rental costs by reducing the number of square meters per employee. In Poland, consulting companies and architects first tried to sell activity-based working in a similar fashion as a cost-reduction tool, but the response from the market was moderate. Thus, the dominant narrative about the activity-based workplace is currently that of a modern office that meets the needs of employees and especially of Millennials. It is supposed to deliver tailored solutions that satisfy different age groups and help companies retain employees.

The clean-desk policy

The overflow of things is something that organizations are trying to learn to live with. Sometimes the mess is treated as part of the company culture and it is discursively explained as a visible sign of creativity, the sign of a homey and cozy atmosphere, or a sign of a business where things are going well: it is so viable and fast-paced that there is no time to clean up the mess.

Some companies try to develop policies that make it easier for managers to demand order and tidiness; some such policies fail, others succeed. The introduction of activity-based working and desk-sharing especially increases pressure on employees to keep things in order. The clean-desk policy is an attempt to deal with the overflow of private things and documentation. At the end of the working day, all things must be removed from the desk; even such items as teacups or pens must be put away into lockers.

'If a cluttered desk is a sign of a cluttered mind, of what, then, is an empty desk a sign?' – Albert Einstein allegedly asked.[4] In a world where creativity is so highly valued, an empty desk seems to be a paradox. Eric Abrahamson examined the connection between creativity and mess and concluded that neatness has certainly become

4 This quotation or slight variations of it have been variously ascribed to Truman Twill, Lyndon B. Johnson, Laurence J. Peter, and Paul A. Freund.

a multibillion-dollar business, but he was not so sure whether the payoff of keeping things in order outweighs the cost. Oddly enough, office messiness tends to increase sharply with increasing education, salary, and experience (Abrahamson and Freedman, 2006: 32–33).

Tim Harford (2016: 65) noted in his analysis on mess in the workspace that 'So far the desire for formal order is winning. We like tidiness to the point of fetishizing it; we find clutter and irregularity disturbing and don't notice when it is doing us good'. The tidiness obsession is nothing new; rather, it is a recurring fad. The *Business etiquette handbook* printed in 1965 warned against overdecoration of one's desk, suggesting, in fact, that the proper atmosphere for business is neatness (Harford 2016: 66).

Smart offices

Activity-based work created a need for real-time coordination of space utilization. The dream of both architects and office managers is to use smartphone apps or beacons or special cards that make it possible to generate reports on the number of employees working in an office and where exactly they work, in order to calculate not only how many, but also the type of spaces needed. The buzzwords are: 'Internet of things' and 'smart workplace'. First such tools are created and employed in practice. For example, Philips used smartphone apps in the Edge, an office building in Amsterdam. The company created a tool that was initially designed to monitor how the office is utilized and to control energy usage, so that the system could switch off lights in areas where no one was working. 'Facility managers use the software to visualize and analyze this data, track energy consumption and streamline maintenance operations', is the explanation on the company's website.[5] Thus, the overflow is framed as something that can be managed as soon as it is made visible. But this app also proves that it is possible to exert control – in real time – over the number of people who work within an office:

> It knows where you live. It knows what car you drive. It knows who you're meeting with today and how much sugar you take in your coffee. (At least it will, after the next software update.) […] From the minute you wake up, you're connected. The app checks your schedule, and the building recognizes your car when you arrive and directs you to a parking spot.

5 http://www.lighting.philips.com/main/cases/cases/office/edge.

> Then the app finds you a desk. Because at the Edge, you don't have one. No one does. Workspaces are based on your schedule: sitting desk, standing desk, work booth, meeting room, balcony seat, or 'concentration room.' Wherever you go, the app knows your preferences for light and temperature, and it tweaks the environment accordingly. (Randall, 2015: 74)

Fascinating or scary? This description, written by Tom Randall for *Bloomberg Businessweek*, may make one's hair stand on end. Drawn to its logical conclusion, Smart Office becomes an electronic Panopticon:[6] The prisoners never see the guards, but they are constantly under surveillance.

There are other apps that use the location of the smartphone to find the nearest available meeting-room, book it, and provide directions to the room; or show where people are in the office.[7]

Polish managers are aware of these novelties, but just like their Western European counterparts, they still rely on less sophisticated technologies to arrange activities in time and space. They use add-ons for Outlook – again, the underlying assumption being that activities can be managed once they are made visible in calendars or charts. All meetings are planned with the space-booking system: in front of each conference room is a tablet hanging on the wall that displays information about forthcoming reservations. The presence of people in the conference room must be confirmed by clicking a button on the tablet within the first quarter of the meeting; otherwise the system cancels the meeting and other employees can book the room. The overflow of people and activities is – with the means of technology and space-utilization protocols – channeled into separated, purified flows that are directed into separate space vessels.

Learning to live with overflow: new coping strategies

Too much happens at the workplace – too many people, too many activities, too many things … These overflows are dealt with by creating new coping strategies: activity-based working, desk-sharing,

6 A panopticon is a building in which all the occupants can be seen from one vantage point. Social activist Jeremy Bentham originally introduced the concept in the eighteenth century for the design of prisons, to eliminate the need for discipline and punishment.

7 http://www.arubanetworks.com/v/?v=/Events/ATM2015_KeertiDEMO3_INTELLIGENTWORKPLACE.mp4&width=960&height=540&t=Demo%202:%20Intelligent%20Workplace.

clean-desk policies, and the employment of applications to control the flows. One of the unintended results is, as Latour (1993) has noted, that new hybrids still can be and are continuously created.

The management of different overflows follows a similar logic: to separate, purify, visualize, and subordinate to strict rules. Separation involves the endowing of old activities with new meanings; talking on the phone becomes an activity generating noise, for example, just as consulting a colleague does. Then new categories of space are created for these newly distinguished types of activities: phone booths that create a soundproof environment, standing meeting-points, ad hoc meeting-booths with fully upholstered internal faces. Types of activities are separated and special areas that indicate quiet or noisy zones are marked on space plans, which become covered with bubbles in different colors. Strict rules are introduced – 'We do not pick up or make telephone calls in the open space' – and new institutions are inscribed in workspace by signs and graphics.

In most business cases – to paraphrase Cochoy (2012: 52) – overflows sooner or later manage to challenge managerial efforts to control flows, and some overflows (like mess) have been successful in doing so for over 100 years. Managing overflows is always an ongoing process, with new ways of coping still to be introduced.

5

Just like any other business or a special case? Framing excess in a Swedish newspaper group

Elena Raviola

> Few have missed the fact that the daily press is in crisis. Honestly, there has been so much nagging about it in the daily press that many readers have ended their subscriptions just to avoid reading more complaints about it. (Aagård, 2015: 5)[1]

Dramatic headlines about the more or less imminent death of the traditional daily press have, in fact, filled pages of newspapers, magazines, and even scientific journals. Since Philip Meyer (2004) predicted in *The vanishing newspaper* that newsprint would be dead by 2043, and since the memorable cover of the 24 August 2006 issue of *The Economist* asked, 'Who killed the newspaper?', scholars, experts, and journalists have pointed to a number of causes for the demise. Structural changes, digitalization, declining advertising revenues, declining circulation of paid-for newspapers, and an increasing online 'for free' culture, have been filling the pages of newspapers, magazines, and scientific journals in an attempt to explain the newspaper crisis (Mierzejewska and Shaver, 2014; Picard, 2014). As Swedish journalist Martin Aagård wrote in his article on the case for stopping state support to 'media kings', 'the question is almost never whether it could be media companies' own fault that things go badly' (Aagård, 2015: 5).

Often called the 'Fourth Estate', newspapers have been treated as a special industry, necessary for the survival of democracy. The 1960s and 1970s were a crucial period of growth for newspapers not only economically, but also culturally. As *The Economist* mentioned

1 All the quotations from Swedish material in this chapter are the author's own translations.

in its report on the death of newspapers, at the beginning of the 1970s 'two reporters from the *Washington Post* wrote a series of articles that brought down President Nixon and the status of print journalism soared' (*The Economist*, 2006). Thus, tears over the disappearance of the newspapers are charged not only by economic despair for the loss of an industry and many jobs, but especially, and perhaps even more after President Trump's election, by civic worries for democracy.

The crisis, which has been feeding a global debate for at least 20 years, has many local variations of hopes, struggles, and despair. Downsizing by newspapers has encouraged many journalists to start their own businesses and to propose their own journalistic innovations. The managements of other established newspapers have decided to merge or acquire one another in order to survive. Others have simply ceased to exist. This chapter tells the story of Stampen Media Group, a family-owned Swedish newspaper organization. Its journey of survival over a decade took it from a position of success – the most successfully expanded local media group in the country – to a position of near-bankruptcy. It is a story of hope turned to despair, the story of a media organization presented as exemplary in international industry conferences to a story of destructive overflow.

> It is the media-industry fair [here in Gothenburg], the meeting-point of a sector moving against the wind. It is a difficult time for everybody; Google and Facebook take advertising money, the mobile and social media take readers. And Peter Hjörne's Stampen has done worst of all, with the biggest loss in Swedish newspaper history, more than SEK 1 billion [EUR 105 million] over the past two years. (*Uppdrag granskning*,[2] SVT, 15 April 2015)

With these words, Stampen's crisis was described in 'Winners and losers of the newspaper game', broadcast by SVT (Swedish Public Service Television) in April 2015. Stampen is one of the biggest Swedish media groups, owner of several local newspapers in western Sweden, with headquarters in the second-largest Swedish city, Gothenburg. Over the past five years, after having experienced significant growth, it finds itself in a serious financial crisis.

In explaining what went wrong with Stampen's development, various types of overflow were discussed in the public debate. The

2 *Uppdrag granskning* is a television program run by investigative journalists. Hereafter the abbreviation *UG* is used throughout this chapter.

idea for this chapter arose from the *Uppdrag granskning* program among the reportage, for which owners, directors, journalists, and readers of Stampen were interviewed in an attempt to identify those responsible for the crisis of the media group. The analysis is based on that reportage, on related published materials, and on relevant Swedish newspaper articles published between January 2010 and April 2017 and downloaded from the database Mediearkivet with the keywords 'Stampen's crisis' ('Stampens kris' in Swedish).

An analysis of the public debate permitted me to distinguish three types of excesses, which were diagnosed over time as a consequence of shifting frames for justifying past, current, and future actions. All the frames are consistent in identifying the current problem of scarcity of financial resources, but the reasons for this scarcity seem to change over time: were there too many costly acquisitions, were staff overpaid, or were operating costs too high?

In what follows, I first present a brief history of Stampen Media Group, then introduce three types of overflow and analyze how they have been diagnosed, discussed, and to varying degrees managed. I conclude by discussing how comparisons between Stampen and other companies as well as Stampen's past history are used to frame the different overflows.

Stampen

Stampen Media Group was founded in 1988, when its newly appointed CEO, Peter Hjörne, the third-generation successor to the family business, bought out the minor owners of the local newspaper, *Göteborgs-Posten* (*GP*), originally founded in 1813 (Wedel, 2015). In 2005, with a new CEO imported from the top management of Burger King, Stampen entered a period of expansion which began with the acquisition of Centertidningar (the Center Party Newspaper Group) for SEK 1.8 billion (EUR 189 million).[3] Stampen continued growing, not least because of aggressive acquisitions, and became one of the largest media groups in Sweden. The acquisitions were primarily financed by large bank loans (Johansson and Grahn-Hinnfors, 2016) and motivated by the desire to be ready for the digital future, assuming 'a big responsibility for the development of mass media' in Sweden, as Peter Hjörne has said (*UG*, 15 April 2015).

3 The Center Party is a Swedish non-socialist political party whose agenda emphasizes environmental and rural issues. At the latest general election in Sweden, in September 2018, the Center Party's share of the vote was 8.6%.

Although Stampen was often presented as a success at international newspaper conferences, and indeed seemed to have constructed a new way of surviving in gloomy scenarios of the future of newspapers, its shining growth came to a sudden stop in 2014. The 2013 income statement reported a loss of SEK 862 million (EUR 90.6 million), mainly because the excessive goodwill assets of earlier acquisitions were finally written off, as many journalists and researchers have confirmed on several occasions (Ohlsson, 2012). In the summer of 2014, banks required a payback of SEK 600 million (EUR 63.1 million), which caused a liquidity crisis within the corporation. Several actions were taken to remedy this crisis in the following years: the organization was restructured, separating paper and online operations; downsizing plans were implemented; acquired companies were sold below cost price; and a new CEO was appointed.

In December 2015, the situation became even more difficult after the Swedish Higher Court, following a European Union decision, changed the Value Added Tax (VAT) on printing. Now the group was suddenly in debt to the Swedish Tax Agency (STA) for SEK 375 million (EUR 39.4 million). The STA wanted its money and so did the banks. Martin Alsander, who had been Stampen's CEO since 2014, described the situation at the beginning of 2016 in an interview:

> In early 2016, we were forced to deal with the liquidity issue, and we started making acquaintance with the notion of reconstruction. We couldn't both pay off our loans to the banks and pay the taxes. We needed a plan for doing both. (Kennedy, 2016: 20).

In May 2016, Stampen, which had been declared on the verge of bankruptcy many times in the press, started a financial reconstruction process: 'the largest [Swedish] reconstruction after Saab Automobile, taking into account the number of employees' (Olander and Hofbaue, 2016: 8). The decision was announced to the public through a press conference, and employees learned of the decision the same day when an Intranet message called them to a morning personnel meeting with 'significant information on the future of Stampen from the board of directors and top management'. A financial reconstruction is an alternative to filing for bankruptcy and is aimed at saving companies that have undergone severe losses for several years and have severe financial difficulties, but which are believed to have some hope of survival. It is common for the reconstruction process, led by a reconstructor assigned by the court, to include an agreement by which the creditors consent to cede part of their claims. With

the help of the reconstructor, and during many negotiations with banks and other creditors, Stampen has managed to sell many of the newspapers in its group over the past few years, pay off a major part of the financial debt – reduced from about SEK 1 billion (EUR 105 million) to SEK 380 million (EUR 39.9 million) – and negotiate a new agreement with both the banks and the STA.

Stampen's crisis has been widely and publicly discussed, and various explanations have been formulated, the most common being the following:

> It is a deliberate – but expensive – investment at the beginning of the 2000s that is behind the economic crisis in Stampen, which owns *Göteborgs-Posten*, among others. The then-top management, with Tomas Brunegård and Peter Hjörne in the driving seat, bought a range of newspapers and other companies with borrowed money. (TT News Agency, 2016: 15)

Stampen, along with VLT and Mittmedia, participated in the 2005 acquisition of the Center Newspaper Group. Then the financial crisis came, and advertising revenues fell dramatically. Over the course of a few years, Stampen lost SEK 1 billion (EUR 105 million) in advertising revenues. Then the so-called printing-tax decision came, in consequence of which Stampen was ordered to pay back about SEK 380 million (EUR 39.9 million) in taxes (TT News Agency, 2016: 15).

During this debate, Stampen's various excesses and scarcities have been presented: excessive salaries, bonuses, and operating costs; and too many costly acquisitions. The analysis in this chapter focuses on how various overflows were diagnosed by different ways of framing the given situation and how these frames shifted over time as justifications for the recognized lack of money.

Excess 1: Too many costly acquisitions

Costly acquisitions represent the dominant frame for explaining what went wrong with Stampen. Framed this way, the story is relatively simple. Too many companies were acquired over the course of 10 years at too high a price, creating excessive debt. Although top management and the board of directors have been held responsible for the consequences of this misevaluation, they have suffered no personal consequences. Quoting media expert Jan Scherman, writing for the national newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* and business director

of Aftonbladet TV, the television channel of the tabloid *Aftonbladet*: 'The catastrophic situation of Stampen is first of all the result of the owners' and management's faulty judgment over several years' (Scherman, 2016: 5).

One recurrent expression when explaining Stampen's crisis within this framework was to say that 'they have "overbought"'; they have calculated poorly and acquired too much. The most scrutinized purchase was the 2005 acquisition of the Center Newspaper Group by Stampen, VLT, and Mittmedia, which included 11 newspapers previously owned by the Center Party. Theirs was the highest bid at SEK 1.8 billion (EUR 189 million). Consequently, Stampen's debt increased sevenfold, reaching SEK 1 billion (EUR 105 million) (*UG*, 15 April 2015).

Tomas Brunegård, CEO of Stampen at the time, explained the rationale behind the acquisition strategy by appealing to the necessity of building a competitive advantage for the future:

> In Sweden, we have a very strong tradition of local newspapers. It has remained strong, but competition has become stronger and will be even stronger in the future. It will come from free newspapers, national media, Google – newcomers, in short – and we want to lead the development in all this through a stronger collaboration and the creation of conditions for a better competitive advantage. (From TV News *Mittnytt*, 2005, in *UG*, 15 April 2015)

Brunegård relied on market-oriented arguments, framing the acquisitions as necessary in order to survive and be successful in the future. This market frame was based on future expectations of how the media would evolve. In particular, in the words of a member of the board, 'There was a strong belief in the future and the feeling that one should build something, that one had built something big, and that one would build something that was even bigger' (Sten Sjögren, *UG*, 15 April 2015).

Expectations regarding future developments were crucial for justifying the acquisition strategy as not only sensible and appropriate, but even – at least in some respects – as prudent. Calling the acquisition a 'calculated risk' in a 2005 interview with the leading national newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*, the then-CEO said that 'it would have be bolder to desist' (Syrén, Carlsson, and Thunborg, 2016: 16).

Many experts point at 2012 as the year of dramatic change in the media business. That year, in the aftermath of the financial crisis, advertising revenues fell dramatically, and future expectations

for Stampen's acquired newspapers collapsed. Ironically, it was the same year in which Stampen published the book *Avstampet*[4] ('Springboard'), celebrating the greatness of CEO Brunegård and the creation of Stampen's media empire. As Arne Lapidus (2014: 32–33) noted in *Kvällsposten*, 'almost nobody predicted that digitalization would affect both readers and advertisers in such a powerful way. It was a dramatic fall for advertising revenues'.

Within 10 years, what had been perceived as a limited risk and an investment in the future was seen as an extravagant and indiscriminate shopping spree. The most-cited acquisition was definitely that of the Center Newspaper Group, which for many has become the most evident symbol of Stampen's excess: 'The problem emerged in 2005 when Center Newspapers were sold. They were bought on the basis of faulty calculations. Stampen's leaders did not believe that the digital transformation of the advertising market would happen so quickly, says Melesko' (Lapidus, 2014: 32). Stefan Melesko, Associate Professor of Media Economics at Jönköping International Business School, has estimated that the acquisition was overpriced by SEK 600–700 million (EUR 63.1–73.6 million).

Expectations for the future are the basis of the so-called goodwill value: the difference between the purchase price and the value of the assets concerned. Goodwill accounts for hopes for future income that the assets will generate. These hopes seemed to be unfounded, however, as one industry expert observed from the outside:

> The group has long been moving between hope and despair. From the outside, it has long been perceived as over-optimistic, but it has never been claimed that the problems are as big as they appear to an outsider. But now it is evident that the banks have finally tired of Stampen. (Malin Ekman, media expert at *Svenska Dagbladet*, in Johansson and Grahn-Hinnfors, 2016: 14)

Peter Hjörne, chairperson of the board at Stampen, responded to reporters from *UG* when asked if the board had reflected after each acquisition:

> *Reporter:* Did you think after each acquisition?
>
> *Peter Hjörne:* Yes, if you think we ran around with some sort of mass-media shopping-cart and just threw things into it that we found on our way, that is a totally absurd thought. We have taken, and feel we have taken, a big responsibility for the mass media development, for our position in it, and we have done this with consideration, and

4 *Avstampet* is also a play on words ('Avstampet' – 'Stampen').

> we have done it with calculation, and we have done it with the approval of the banks along the way, and we were certainly not alone in this kind of judgment. Yes, sure, we have thought carefully, and calculated. But everything did not turn out exactly the way one had thought. (*UG*, 15 April 2015)

About a year later, at the announcement of the reconstruction, Peter Hjörne recognized that the realization of the Stampen management's own thoughts had gone wrong and that some of the acquisitions were excessive. He made it clear that

> [t]he problem is not our operations, which go well, without that backpack of debt that we carry, primarily after the acquisition of the Center Newspapers. It is the debt level that we need to handle now, through the financial reconstruction. (Syrén, Carlsson and Thunborg, 2016: 16)

A goodwill factor may either turn out to be appropriate if hopes are realized, or turn out to be 'a castle in the air' if they are not. When expectations are not met after some years, and the value of the acquired company decreases, the goodwill is considered excessive and needs to be partially written off in the balance sheet. This is what happened with Stampen's acquisitions. After media analysts and auditors had highlighted the goodwill value as excessive, Stampen's top management finally decided to write it off at the end of 2013: 'We will make adjustments this year and will decrease the goodwill values in Stampen's balance sheet. We still believe in newspapers and their ability to create value and make a profit' (Tomas Brunegård, in Andén, 2013).

This move resulted in a significant loss in Stampen's income statement and decreased the solidity of the company, which was reported as having fallen from 22% in 2013 to about 7.8% in 2015 (Lundin, 2015: 18). In turn, the banks demanded that Stampen pay off SEK 600 million (EUR 63.1 million) in debt. Stampen did not have enough cash to meet the banks' demands. The solution was to sell companies: newspapers that had been excessively acquired would leave the group, and the required money would enter the bank account. As Martin Alsander confirmed during an interview with *Göteborgs-Posten*, Stampen sold 25 companies between 2014 and 2016, giving the banks some confidence in the ability of the media group to pay off its debt. Financial divestitures were not the only way to remedy the lack of funds, however; cutting operating costs that were deemed unnecessary (see Excess 3) was another way of saving money and thus contributing to payment of the debt.

Excess 2: Salaries and bonuses

Another recurrent theme in the debate around Stampen's crisis concerned the excessive compensation given to top managers and the board of directors in the form of salaries, bonuses, and dividends, with CEO Tomas Brunegård and owner-chairperson Peter Hjörne in top positions.

Many numbers were mentioned in the public debate – and not without moral disapproval – to show how a small group of people at Stampen became rich while leading the company to collapse. It was by means of comparison that the size of remunerations to top managers and directors was framed as either appropriate or excessive. In his report on 'the decadence of the old Swedish newspaper barons', a well-known journalist wrote:

> 2004 – the year of the acquisition of the Center Newspapers – Stampen paid approximately SEK 16 million [EUR 1.68 million] in dividends to the owners and SEK 2.7 million [EUR 283,000] to the directors and top managers in salary and remuneration.
>
> 2012 – the dividends had increased to SEK 48 million [EUR 5 million] to the owners and approximately SEK 21 million [EUR 2.2 million] in salary to directors and top managers. (af Kleen, 2014, 7 September: 56)

A comparison over time was a way for the journalist to demonstrate excessive remuneration. For Stampen's owner, Peter Hjörne, however, time is precisely the reason why remunerations cannot be deemed to be excessive. To a question about the multimillion-kronor salaries received by the then-CEO, he answered: 'One can always discuss the level of remuneration, but I don't really want to comment on single individuals. I can only note that the agreement was signed in another time, with future predictions other than those that became reality' (Syrén, Carlsson, and Thunborg, 2016). To the journalist who urged him to consider the time comparison, he answered:

> I am not stupid, nor deaf, nor blind. And I can understand that you have opinions on high salaries if you don't have one yourself.
>
> But it is time to make the debate more reasonable […] In my grandfather's time, virtually no dividends were paid. But I don't think it is a reasonable approach today, if one wants to have some shareholders remaining. When I look back at the last 10 years, I can observe that we have paid out on average 9.2% of our internally generated resources. If one had made an evaluation of the group, sold it and placed the money somewhere else, the return would have been very much higher. (af Kleen, 25 December 2014: 58)

Unlike his grandfather's flourishing and expanding newspaper, Peter Hjörne's Stampen of the second decade of the 2000s was comparable to the big and doomed-to-fail *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*. This was the biggest newspaper in Gothenburg in the first half of the twentieth century, and it died the year before the government established newspaper subsidies. As one journalist observed:

> The leading newspaper in Gothenburg in the first half of the 1900s was *Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, and Harry Hjörne had competed against it and won. The newspaper had been harshly criticized because the owners took a crazy amount of dividends. Exactly the same criticism that Peter Hjörne is facing. It was also criticized for not being able to judge the future competitive situation. This is exactly what *GP* has fallen into, as they made these violently expensive acquisitions of print newspapers in a situation where it was evident to most people that print newspapers would be facing many problems in the near future. (Sandström, 2016: 10)

As Hjörne's reasoning demonstrates, not only was the past used as a term of comparison to frame the excessive level of remuneration, but salaries, dividends, and bonuses were compared to those of other companies as well. The debate then continued over the types of companies that could serve as a fair comparison to Stampen. According to the owner, newspapers ought to be compared to any other company, in terms of top managers' salaries and return on investment. As Hjörne stated on the *UG* program in 2015, 'shareholders in a media company do not need to settle for less than the general market yields'. Otherwise, he argued, it would be difficult to recruit competent managers and attract shareholders.

Another line of reasoning compared Stampen to other newspapers and media companies, deeming them special types of organizations because of their role as upholders of democracy. Following this line of argument, the remunerations received by Stampen's top management, directors, and owners were significantly higher than the ones paid by other similar organizations and thus excessive. The CEO's part-time work was remunerated with SEK 492,000 (EUR 51,700) monthly: 'SVT's president [this is an honorary rather than an operative title] receives a quarter of that amount in remuneration. Per year.' (af Kleen, 25 September 2014: 59).

This line of reasoning, which had parallels with the public condemnation of the greedy financial sector during the last financial crisis (Czarniawska, 2012), was presented by a majority of journalists and commentators reporting on Stampen's crisis. Almost echoing the criticisms of Gordon Gekko's eulogy to greed in the film *Wall*

Street, the excesses of Stampen's top managers and directors were treated with explicit moral disapproval:

> At the same time, there is news about a crisis in the newspaper industry. The magazine *Journalisten* [the journalists' union magazine] has published a list of the chief editors and owners who have gained the most over the past years (16 December 2014). The fact that *Dagens Nyheter*'s [the largest national morning newspaper] Gunilla Herlitz received SEK 19 million [EUR 2 million] led to an uproar of the newsroom last year, but she only ends up in sixth place. The list is led by Stampen's majority owner Peter Hjörne and by Hallpressen's president, Lovisa Hamrin, both with a total income of more than SEK 70 million [EUR 7.4 million] during the period 2009–2013. This shows that the most serious crisis of the daily press is not economic. It is intellectual and moral. (Lindgren, 2015: 61)

Just as it was during the financial crisis, this moral disapproval is directed not only against Stampen, but also against other media companies which are perceived to have taken the wrong path of managerialization. As one commentator suggested, the newspaper crisis is caused by an IT bubble, which has drawn attention away from core operations and 'like so many other media companies, Stampen has lost its organizational culture and become just as "corporate" as any other publicly listed company' (Aagård, 2015: 5).

The excessive remuneration paid to top managers and directors at Stampen were even more severely blamed in the public debate after the announcement of the reconstruction. Salaries, bonuses, and dividends were juxtaposed to the number of people who were laid off during the same period: the twin excesses of overflowing payments and overflowing workers completed the picture of greedy, irresponsible, unpunished leaders against loyal, hardworking employees who were losing out through no fault of their own. The next section describes this type of excess in greater detail.

Excess 3: Excessive operating costs

The third type of excess diagnosed in Stampen's crisis was excessive operating costs. These costs have required employees to be laid off, newsrooms reduced, contracts with printing plants canceled, and many functions centralized.

The idea of cost-saving had always been expressed as one of the advantages of Stampen's expansion. On the long tail of the synergy-and-convergence thinking that had characterized the development of media companies during the IT bubble at the beginning of the

2000s, the owner and the CEO justified the expansion as being necessary for survival. According to them, size would allow them to make savings on the cost of printing, development, and distribution. As was pointed out, though, the coordination advantages were overestimated (Lapidus, 2014: 33).

The cost of operations in the newly expanded group were not perceived as excessive, however, until advertising revenues fell dramatically in 2012. Advertising decreased significantly in the company's newspaper, and they did not grow enough online to compensate for the loss. As Hjörne explained, this was a problem for everybody in the industry, and not even Schibsted, the company leading digital development in the Nordic countries, managed to compensate for the loss of newspaper advertising revenues. Consequently, as one journalist described it,

> Sinking advertising revenues and fewer subscribers perplex the family business owners [many Swedish newspapers used to be owned by families], which only 20 years ago had the information monopoly in their cities. During 2013, about 40 local newsrooms closed down in Sweden. (af Kleen, 7 September 2014: 56)

In the face of decreasing revenues, the cost of operations was deemed excessive, and various solutions were proposed to manage the overflow. One solution was to reduce editorial costs by laying off newsroom staff or even closing down entire newsroom sections. Another was to reduce the frequency of publication from seven days a week to three or four. Martin Alsander, Stampen's new CEO, explained:

> We are present in 40 towns, and it is clear that perhaps it is not optimal to have a seven-day newspaper in all of them […]. In printing operations, you want to have fewer production units and optimize publications to a lower number of days. And in this way reduce the costs. (af Kleen, 12 May 2014: 7)

Peter Hjörne mentioned the example of *Nya Lidköpings-Tidningen*, which is published three days a week and which he defined as 'one of Sweden's most successful newspapers, both journalistically and economically'. He went on to say:

> Having said that, we are not necessarily going toward a three-day model. But somewhere between seven and three. We have not made the decision yet. We are looking at all the possibilities of decreasing costs while at the same time giving readers what they want. (af Kleen, 12 May 2014: 7)

This solution provoked worried reactions from Stampen's employees and from other journalists. Their concern was that a lower publication frequency could lead to a further reduction of newsroom personnel, creating an even greater overflow of journalists.

During his first two years as CEO, Martin Alsander took significant cost-cutting measures, leading to the closure of a number of printing plants and the laying off of more than 400 employees. But this was not enough to compensate for the excessive debt and the lack of money to pay off the banks and the tax agency. It was decided that reconstruction would save jobs and operations.

Framing overflow by comparison

The story of Stampen and its crisis demonstrates that different frames explaining the crisis coexisted both in conflict and concord, and produced various interrelated overflows. Given an underflow that needed to be managed – the scarcity of money – different ways of framing the reasons for these underflows pointed to the need for various excesses to be reduced.

The public debate presented in this chapter is a good example of a disagreement over appropriate framings and overflows. The analysis has revealed that comparison is the most common mechanism used to frame a certain situation and thus deem it appropriate or excessive. This comparison might concern time: the Stampen of today was compared with other industrial or media companies and with the Stampen of the past. Such comparisons shed new light on Stampen and made its crisis seem 'normal', given the newspaper industry crisis and the business development of other companies, or 'excessive', when it is noted that other media companies had much lower remunerations, acquisitions, and debt.

Czarniawska and Löfgren (2013) have noted that overflow is often morally charged and treated as a negative surplus that needs to be reduced. Indeed, Stampen did not escape moral disapproval. Conflicts over what should be deemed an appropriate frame for comparisons regarding Stampen's situation underlined a moral quest to find those who should be considered responsible for the catastrophe, as it was often called. The 'normality' of Stampen's crisis, decisively claimed by its owner Peter Hjörne (who, in mentioning Schibsted's difficulties, aligned Stampen's remunerations with those of all other businesses), made the market responsible for the crisis, relieving top management, directors, and owners of responsibility. But the most prevalent way of framing Stampen's crisis was to consider it exceptional in comparison to any other media company, and to make top management, directors,

and owners responsible for the difficult situation – principals who had been celebrated as successful as recently as two years before. Now they were transformed into greedy people, responsible for an unprecedented collapse in the history of Swedish media.

It is noteworthy that the public debate around the three framings and overflows favored economic explanations of the crisis and silenced any other ways of understanding the situation. As economic historian Jan Jörnmark remarked:

> When I was invited to write this article, the most important question was what local people say about the catastrophe [of Stampen] and what effect it can have. If one tries to have an overview of the social flows of reactions, what prevails in many perspectives is a pure malicious pleasure owing to the fact that a newspaper which had long avoided writing about the city's most important questions finally collapsed. Another perspective would be to worry about how the information flow will change. But all this is a sign that Gothenburg finds itself in a transition. The city's traditional internal agreement and close culture are breaking down. (Jörnmark, 2016: 6)

None of the experts and journalists who reported on Stampen's crisis mentioned the quality of the published newspapers as a possible reason for the decreasing circulation and the decreasing revenues that accompanied it.

In my analysis, I have identified three overflows that have been framed as possible causes of the near-bankruptcy of the Stampen Media Group: too many acquisitions, too high salaries and bonuses (for top management), and too high operating costs. The public debate on Stampen's crisis contested these overflows, as the amount of acquisitions, salaries and bonuses, and operating costs are considered normal or excessive depending on the terms of comparison. For example, Stampen's bonuses to top managers were normal compared to any other public company, but excessive compared to the company's history and to other newspapers. Thus the contestations and negotiations around different framings of overflows are not simply a matter of communication but have practical effects on the actions taken to remedy the excess. These effects are very real, as many fired journalists and closed newsrooms testify.

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6

Overflowing with uncertainty: controversies regarding epistemic wagers in climate-economy models

Jonathan Metzger

> But it seems that we have, without knowing it, made an immensely dangerous bet: namely, that we'll be able to use the power and knowledge we have gained in the past couple of centuries to cope with the climate risks we've unleashed over the same period. Will we win that bet? Time will tell.
>
> Unfortunately, if the bet goes bad, we won't get another chance to play. (Krugman, 2013)

This chapter relates questions of overflow to epistemic politics – the social process of establishing what constitutes valid and robust knowledge within a specific community of practice.[1] The community of practice in this case pertains to the scientific field of climate economics,[2] a subfield of economics that deals with the potential effects of climate change understood in economic terms and the potential costs and benefits of various measures geared to mitigating that change. It focuses on various policy measures undertaken to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs), and specifically the most common (albeit not most potent) of these: carbon dioxide (CO_2). The vast majority of climate economists agree that human-induced emissions of GHGs are currently leading to a process of global warming. Yet there is broad disagreement among climate economists about the precise economic effects of this geophysical

1 I wish to thank Per Wikman Svahn and my colleagues in the Managing Overflow project, particularly Barbara Czarniawska, for their helpful comments on previous versions of this chapter. Of course, I am personally fully responsible for any remaining omissions and errors.

2 Sometimes interchangeably referred to as the 'economics of climate change' or the 'economics of global warming'.

process and what is to be considered a well-designed policy response to these changes.

To be able to model various possible economic outcomes of global climatic changes and the potential strengths and weaknesses of various policy responses, climate economists have generally relied on so-called Integrated Assessment[3] Models (IAMs). IAMs are advanced computer programs that integrate models of various types of natural and social processes, to arrive at conclusions regarding the potential interplay between the modeled processes. Climate-economic models are one specific type of IAM that integrate all these effects into a single commensurable currency – generally USD GDP. IAM modelers argue that the use of such models enables them to compress an overflow of disparate pieces of information into a comprehensible, systematic whole, to allow for rigorous policy analysis that can contribute to the development of economically efficient, or even 'optimal', responses to the identified overflow of climate gases in the atmosphere.

However, an increasing number of climate economists are disputing claims about the usefulness of the IAMs in guiding climate policy. They argue that the framing of the problem provided by the IAMs is invalid because of the overflow of uncertainty produced by spurious and unwarranted assumptions that are integrated into the fundamental model structures. They further maintain that the identified cascade of uncertainties they find to be connected to the economic effects of global warming means that any results of models dependent upon these arbitrarily formulated assumptions have limited plausibility, to say the least. The IAM proponents tend to disagree with (or simply disregard) these accusations. The result is a controversy over whether there actually is an overflow of uncertainty within and because of the structure of the models – and if so, how serious it is.

In this chapter, I investigate how IAM proponents within the community of climate economists have framed the problem of how to perform an analysis of the economic impacts of global warming as fundamentally pertaining to the design of a correct cost–benefit analysis of this phenomenon; and how a group of IAM-skeptical scholars deemed the solutions proposed by the IAM advocates as unsatisfactory, maintaining that the IAM advocates were unable to contain the problem in question. No conclusive agreement has been

3 IA, Integrated Assessment, is a broader definition of practices for integrative analyses that are not necessarily mathematically formalized into a model and which can also contain qualitative and deliberative components.

reached between these two groups on whether the framing produces an overflow of uncertainties. This overflow controversy can thus be conceived of as a disagreement over what constitutes a tolerable *epistemic wager* – a helpful term introduced by Dan-Cohen (2016), who leaves the concept somewhat unspecified. To give this notion some substance and traction in the context of this chapter, I define epistemic wager as an identifiable leap of faith within otherwise rationalistic discourses.

According to Franck Cochoy (2013: 175), highlighting such leaps of faith and the wagers they entail constitutes one of the taboos of modern academic scholarship. Like most scholars, economists – particularly when producing predictions – must always permit creative and speculative inference to some extent when extrapolating more general conclusions from a limited set of empirical evidence. In other words, they work under conditions of imperfect information. Sometimes, however, questions arise regarding when these inferences are stretched to the degree that they can no longer be considered valid or plausible, or – differently put – when there is 'too much of too little' for a knowledge claim to be credible.

The tolerance for various magnitudes of epistemic wagers can be assumed to vary between various epistemic communities and among different individuals within the same community – which, in this case, comprises climate economists. Thus it can be assumed that at any given point it will be possible to find a variegated set of replies to the question 'How much is too much?' when it comes to epistemic wagers between different epistemic communities or within the same community. Following this reasoning, I suggest that the controversy depicted in the remainder of the chapter can be understood as directly pertaining to that disagreement.

The investigation of scientific controversies is admittedly a strand of research with a distinct pedigree within the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS; see, e.g., Jasanoff, 2012). If there is any degree of novelty in this study, it is in bringing this established research topic together with the issue of enactment of overflows, summarized in the critical questions, 'How much is too much? Why? And according to whom?' (Löfgren and Czarniawska, 2012: 2).[4] This chapter is an attempt to explore the 'cultural dynamics of

4 Additionally, it is certainly not the first study relating questions of economics to discussions on the conceptualization of overflow, seeing that the whole theoretical debate on overflow to some extent has its roots in studies of economics. See particularly Callon (1998).

overflow dramatization', within climate-economic modeling, asking such questions as: 'Who is accusing whom of overflow, in what ways, in what social contexts and for what purposes? What types of overflow are defined as harmful, wasteful or morally bad?' (Löfgren and Czarniawska, 2013: 8).

It should be remembered that '[i]f something "flows over", it leaves one area and enters another: contaminating, enhancing, changing or perhaps having the opposite effect: reinforcing, diluting, and enriching' (Löfgren and Czarniawska, 2012: 4). In this case, the majority of critics argue that the overflow of assumptions in the modeling may be 'contaminating' climate policy by 'diluting' it or 'reinforcing' a business-as-usual (or approximate) approach. Although I do not directly address this more explicitly political aspect of the controversy in this chapter, it is nonetheless important to bear in mind that it forms a crucial backdrop to the disagreements investigated here.[5] Another important opening caveat is that this chapter focuses exclusively on debates on the topic that unfolded within the community of mutually recognizing climate economists. Beyond this narrow circle of colleagues, however, discussions concerning the validity and applicability of these methods for studying climate change have been discussed much longer. Still, it seems that such debates have had only marginal impact on the discipline of neoclassical economics, to which all of the climate economists presented in this chapter belong.[6]

The rest of the chapter is structured as follows. After a short presentation of the foundations and current state of the art, I present some of the major controversies concerning the validity of the mainstream approach to climate-economic modeling. The concluding discussion focuses on conflicting enactments of overflow and the resulting controversies. They coalesce, in one way or another, around disagreements over the issue of 'How much is too much?' in relation to some specific phenomenon or event. What is particularly salient in the controversy discussed here is not only the variegated acceptance of quite daring epistemic wagers within the community of climate economists, but also the extremely dramatic stakes that are dependent upon these wagers.

5 Regarding the latter debate more explicitly concerning the implication of climate-economic modeling with discussions about recommended policy responses, see specifically, e.g., Stern (2008, 2016); Weitzman (2009a, 2009b).

6 For reference, however, see Funtowicz and Ravetz (1994) for early critical voices emerging from outside the neoclassical community.

The basics of mainstream climate-economic modeling

Economists generally apprehend human-induced global warming as a market failure that results from an incorrect pricing of the welfare damage caused by the emission of GHGs. In this vein, leading climate economists have dubbed global warming as 'the biggest market failure the world has seen' (Stern, 2007) and 'the mother of all externalities' (Tol, 2009). The device preferred by economists for dealing with this type of problem is a so-called *Pigouvian tax* – a tax set to a level reflecting the damage that a specific externality causes to human welfare. Its purpose is thus to 'correctly price' the damage caused by some phenomenon and to force those who contribute to this negative phenomenon to carry this cost directly, instead of indirectly imposing it on society as a whole. In environmental policy, the application of Pigouvian taxes is often referred to as the 'polluter-pays' principle. As for GHGs, and particularly CO_2, many countries already apply Pigouvian taxes. Sweden, for example, has efficiently imposed a CO_2 levy since 1991, and the current tax rate for emitting a metric ton of CO_2 is roughly USD 120 (EUR 102). However, some of the largest global emitters of CO_2, such as Russia and the USA, have not yet implemented a general national carbon tax and do not at present plan to do so.[7]

Following this line of reasoning, establishing the optimal price of carbon emissions has become something of a Holy Grail of climate economics. The optimal pricing of CO_2 emissions, sometimes referred to as the social cost of carbon (SCC), is the calculated economic disutility of emitting a metric ton of CO_2 into the atmosphere, considering that this emission may have both positive and negative economic effects, which will emerge over different time scales. In simple terms, it is an attempt to place a value on the total economic damage done by an emitted metric ton of CO_2.

Establishing a robust optimal price of CO_2 emissions would, in turn, allow for the setting of a climate-economic policy (preferably, for most economists, the Pigouvian carbon-tax level) that would regulate the level of CO_2 emissions so they become Pareto-optimizing (i.e., allow for the largest possible total economic growth). Thus, this type of climate-economic work fundamentally entails a type of

7 China, the world's largest emitter of CO_2, has been considering a national carbon tax for a number of years, but it has not yet been implemented. The first-ever nation to abolish its carbon tax was Australia in 2014, which replaced it with a more limited so-called 'emissions reduction fund'.

cost–benefit analysis (CBA), trying to weight various utilities and disutilities against each other, to arrive at an optimal course of action (Weitzman, 2009a,b; Weyant, 2009: 318). Some of the overarching questions related to any CBA concern the factors assumed to affect and be affected by a specific proposed intervention (e.g., the introduction of carbon pricing), how these factors interplay, and how to estimate the dis/utility value of these factors correctly. Another key question concerns the issue of who will suffer disutilities or enjoy utilities, as it is not always evident who should be the target or stipulated consumer, for the benefit of whom the maximization is performed (the entire global human population, the inhabitants of a specific state, something or somebody else?).

As mentioned at the outset, to establish a figure for the optimal CO_2-emission price, climate economists generally utilize IAMs. IAMs function through the integration and co-calibration of various types of quantitative systems analyses of both natural and social phenomena, and their mutual interplay, into a coherent framework. Most current IAMs have their roots in energy-economic models developed in the 1970s, which were later complemented with fuel-specific CO_2 emission coefficients (Parson and Fisher-Vanden, 1997: 591, Weyant, 2009). Acid rain was the first global environmental issue to be analyzed with the help of an IAM. The Regional Air Pollution Information and Simulation (RAINS) models developed by the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) in the 1980s have been credited with providing critical input into the discussions leading to international agreements to limit sulfur emissions (Parson and Fisher-Vanden, 1997: 592; Gough et al., 1998; van der Sluijs, 2002: 137).

What some authors have referred to as a 'rapid surge' of IAMs for climate change occurred from 1990 onwards (Parson and Fisher-Vanden, 1997: 592). In 2002, van der Sluijs (2002: 138) counted no fewer than 50 existing models, the structure and exact purpose of which he deemed to be 'very diverse'. Yet most of them had the goal of integrating 'knowledge that stems from a multitude of scientific disciplines in order to address interconnected aspects of one or more (global) environmental problems in an integrated fashion for the purpose of informing and supporting the policy debate' (van der Sluijs, 2002: 138). Although IAM modeling is currently an academic subfield in its own right, it also plays a significant role as the preferred methodology in most climate-economic research. Parson and Fisher-Vanden (1997: 593–594) stressed that climate-economy IAM modeling can have many purposes: to evaluate policies and responses, to structure

knowledge and prioritize uncertainties, to contribute to basic knowledge of the entire climate system, and to assess broad comparative risk. Nonetheless, in one way or another, most of these models seek in some way to characterize and evaluate the social and economic impacts of climate change (Parson and Fisher-Vanden, 1997: 602).

As mentioned, the IAM models discussed in this chapter have a specific purpose: to utilize a marginalistic, Pareto-optimizing cost–benefit analysis to provide guidance on economically 'optimal' policy, to set an optimal price of CO_2 emissions. This type of climate-economic IAM was pioneered by Yale economist William Nordhaus in the beginning of the 1990s (Nordhaus, 1994). He based his climate-economy model upon his own energy-economy models from the 1970s, adding a carbon-cycle component and climate-change damage function to the overarching framework, dubbed the Dynamically Integrated Climate-Economy (DICE) model.

DICE is based on a neoclassical optimal growth model that rests upon the assumption that both climate damage and emission abatement interventions can lead to production losses. The key policy questions that the model answers concern the optimal balance between the costs of climate damage in relation to the costs of abatement activities and the marginal economic damage of an additional emitted metric ton of CO_2, under various modeled conditions. In the initial versions, DICE treated the entire world economy in an aggregated fashion, but the level of geographic differentiation of the model became increasingly detailed from the late 1990s onwards; consequently, the model was renamed the Regional Integrated Climate-Economy (RICE) model. The recommendations for a preferred-policy response to global warming based on various generations of DICE have been relatively robust. They amount to a calculated optimal path of modest initial carbon prices at early stages, later increased during the period of roughly a century, according to a 'climate-policy-ramp' approach. Throughout his work, Nordhaus has repeatedly conveyed a significant central message: setting an early carbon price too high will be extremely detrimental to global economic growth, and hence makes no economic sense at all.[8]

8 In his most recent book, however, Nordhaus (2013) goes to some lengths to argue that his central message should rather be read as pertaining to the necessity of at least taking some form of immediate action, even if it needs be carefully moderated to minimize the risk of economic damage. In December 2018, Nordhaus was awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences.

To depict in greater detail how these models are constructed and expounded by their developers, I now take a closer look at the documentation of the highly influential DICE/RICE-99 version of Nordhaus's model, as presented by Nordhaus and Boyer (2000). The purpose of their work, they claim, is to 'help modelers and policymakers better understand the complex tradeoffs involved in climate-change policy', suggesting that '[i]n the end, good analysis cannot dictate policy, but it can help policymakers thread the needle between a ruinously expensive climate-change policy that today's citizens will find intolerable and a do-nothing policy that the future will curse us for' (Nordhaus and Boyer, 2000: 7).

Before they proceeded to discuss their analysis in detail, Nordhaus and Boyer made some crucial disclaimers. For instance, they made it clear that the model does not account for all GHGs – only CO_2 – and that it is difficult to make 'solid estimates of the impacts of climate change', due to the 'enormous uncertainties about the underlying physical and biological impacts and about the potential for adaptation', which is why some of the most tricky aspects of the expected damage, such as ecosystem damage valuation and catastrophic risks, were simply omitted from the analysis (Nordhaus and Boyer, 2000: 71). The authors also emphasized that the climate module of the IAM is 'highly simplified and is intended only to depict the broad features of climate change' (Nordhaus and Boyer, 2000: 64).

The model consists of an integrated framework built with modules modeling economic growth dynamics, the carbon cycle, the climate system, and a damage function for estimated economic losses resulting from various levels of global mean temperature rise. Speaking of the temperature, Nordhaus and Boyer (2000: 23) noted that '[e]stimating the damages from greenhouse warming has proven extremely elusive', and that their choice of assumption regarding the relationship between the damage from greenhouse warming and the extent of this warming is a simple quadratic function in which increased warming results in exponentially rising damage. It is also important to note that in their modeling of the economic damage of climate change (DICE/RICE-99) they focused only on direct damage, as it was assumed that indirect damage is too difficult to appreciate and calculate. This is why they also arrived at the conclusion that '90 percent of the economy, however, is not likely to be significantly affected by climate change', thus disregarding any potential knock-on effects, disruption costs, social unrest, increased

security costs, or transaction costs in reallocation of resources, and so on.[9]

Given all their disclaimers, in their final analysis Nordhaus and Boyer landed on an initially mild optimal carbon price, somewhere in the region of USD 5–10 (EUR 4.2–8.4), which was then gradually 'ramped up' to levels somewhere below USD 70 (EUR 58.5) over the course of roughly a century. The level of assertiveness with which they communicated these findings is somewhat confusing, given their statement that 'attempts to estimate the impacts of climate change continue to be highly speculative' and that '[m]uch more work is needed to improve understanding of the impacts of climate change' (Nordhaus and Boyer, 2000: 98), and their later claim that their own model, in contrast to other IAMs, 'contains a complete evaluation of the societal impacts or damages from climate change while most other models stop short of incorporating damages' (Nordhaus and Boyer, 2000: 173).

In their concluding discussion, they presented as 'some unfinished business' the fact that the utilized climate damage function was still tentative and that catastrophic climate change could not be ruled out. But that statement did not hinder them from proclaiming a few pages later that '[i]f there is a single message, it is that climate change is a complex phenomenon, unlikely to be catastrophic in the near term, but potentially highly damaging in the long run' (Nordhaus and Boyer, 2000: 178). It is exactly this self-assured assertiveness that Harvard economist Martin Weitzman (2009) used as an entry point to his criticism of Nordhaus's modeling enterprise. I will soon return to that important intervention, but to describe the context in which it unfolds I must provide a closer look at the first great public controversy within climate economy: the debate about the Stern Review.

9 Discussions of this substantial claim lie somewhat outside the scope of this chapter. Other economists, such as Sterner and Persson (2008), note, however, that a complete collapse of agriculture on earth would in this and similar models result in only a 24% decline in global GDP, given that that is the economic size of this sector. Logic dictates, however, that the follow-on effects on global economic production would be rather more dramatic, to say the least – something that is not accounted for within these models. See also van den Bergh and Botzen (2014).

Some controversies concerning macro-economic approaches to climate change

As the goal of most climate-economy IAMs is to inform policy decisions, they are inevitably contentious devices; they become particularly controversial when it is taken into consideration that various ethical choices are hardwired into the models' underlying assumptions (even if the modelers do not always recognize that to be so – see discussion in Beck and Krueger, 2016). Because of the differences in these assumptions, various IAM-based climate-economy modeling teams have arrived at the optimal CO_2 as anywhere between USD -0.3 and 146 (EUR -0.26 and 124) per emitted metric ton (van den Bergh and Botzen, 2014).[10] Most of the criticism of the variegated assumptions hardwired into the models has come not from mainstream economists, but from other social scientists, and seems to have been largely ignored by the climate economists themselves. During the recent decade, however, the scholarly community of climate economists has been rocked by two major public scientific controversies in which serious doubts regarding the validity of the currently dominant climate-economy models have been expressed: the Stern/Nordhaus controversy and the debate following Martin Weitzman's 'Dismal Theorem'.

The Stern Review is an over-700-page report commissioned by the UK government in 2005. It had a dual purpose: first, to investigate the economics of climate change; second, to provide a comprehensive depiction of the nature of the associated economic challenges, together with recommendations for ways of meeting them, both nationally and globally (Stern, 2007). Sir Nicholas Stern, then Second Permanent Secretary of HM Treasury and Professor of Economics at the London School of Economics, led the investigating team. The review was prepared by a team of economists at the Treasury and took a little more than a year to compile. Because of the routines of the British government, the final report was not subjected to scientific peer review before its release, something that other economists later criticized.

For many of its conclusions, the review relied on modeling results from the IAM PAGE2002, developed by Chris Hope and colleagues at the University of Cambridge. On the basis of these results, the Stern Review arrived at an optimal cost of CO_2 quite far above

10 It is noteworthy that any number below zero would indicate that CO_2 emissions would, when all supposedly relevant factors are considered, constitute a utility – and should, perhaps, even be subsidized rather than penalized.

that suggested by most preceding IAM models. This high estimation was largely due to the introduction of a subjectively low social discount rate (SDR) in comparison to most other models – SDR being the value attached to the welfare of future generations in relation to the present. On the basis of what Stern described as a 'moral principle', he set this rate (or, more technically, the 'pure rate of time preference') at 0.1%, which means, in effect, that the welfare of future generations will be valued as equal to the welfare of the present generation.[11] In addition to the moral argumentation for this choice, Stern presented technical arguments, suggesting that previous modeling of the optimal price of CO_2, such as those Nordhaus had depended upon, relied heavily upon historically documented expectations on short-term market returns on capital, and that using such data as revealed preferences for valuing the welfare of future generations in relation to a potentially existential threat such as global warming amounts to a category error and cannot be accepted as valid.

Stern's argumentation and design choices were harshly criticized by a number of leading climate economists (see, e.g., Mendelsohn, 2006; Tol and Yohe, 2006; Dasgupta, 2007; Nordhaus, 2007; Weitzman, 2007; Yale Symposium on the Stern Review, 2007).[12] The ensuing so-called Stern/Nordhaus controversy was based on a disagreement over what amounts to the most politically sound approach to climate policy: forceful action now, as advocated by Stern, or the postponement of harsher policy measures into the future, in accordance with Nordhaus's climate-policy ramp. But the controversy also contains a moral debate, albeit clad in technical terms, about the wellbeing of future generations. The controversy illustrates how seemingly technical choices in specific assumptions that are incorporated into the design of IAMs can have deep ethical and political implications. There is also a further dimension to this debate: the question of whether it is defensible to formulate recommendations for an optimal level of CO_2 with the help of the established toolkit of mainstream climate economics – a marginalistic CBA using IAM. This is the issue that Stern largely focused upon

11 That the pure rate of time preference (PTP) is not simply set to zero depends upon the introduction of a small correction which accounts for a risk of 1/1000 that humanity will be annihilated in any given future year.

12 As noted by Weitzman (2007), therefore, this controversy constitutes, to some degree, a re-rehearsal of the disagreement over how to set the same parameter between Cline (1992) and Nordhaus (1994).

in his reply to his critics – an issue that constituted a major part of in his 2008 Richard T. Ely lecture at the Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association.

In the opening of his presentation, Stern asserted that global warming is a special type of a particularly wicked problem in relation to economic analysis because: a) it is global in its origins and impact, b) some of its effects are extremely long-term and governed by a stock-flow process, c) there is a great deal of uncertainty in most steps of the scientific chain, and d) the effects are potentially massive and may be irreversible (Stern, 2008: 2). Stern's argument, based on these four specificities of global warming as an economic problem, led to a direct attack on the whole idea of using CBA to calculate an economically optimal path of CO_2 emissions which would then be used to guide policy decisions. He further argued that the relevance of marginalistic analysis, which forms the basis of the type of CBA that most climate economists use to calculate optimal carbon prices, is 'very limited' in relation to political decision-making concerning 'major strategic decisions for the world as a whole, with huge dynamic uncertainties and feedbacks' (Stern, 2008: 11). In such analyses, 'too much depends on assumptions about how decisions are made in a society and on how the participants [modelers] perceive the workings of the future economy' (Stern, 2008: 17). Consequently, he asserted, IAM-based quantitative analyses of the economic effects of global warming 'risk either confusing the issues or throwing out crucial features of the problem' (Stern, 2008: 17). Even worse, Stern claimed, when these models are used 'as vehicles for optimization analysis', they are 'still less credible' due to the models' sensitivity to 'simple structural assumptions', which concern moral issues and subjective judgments of risk that are characterized by a high degree of uncertainty (Stern, 2008: 17).

As an alternative approach, Stern suggested that economists should focus more on developing their thinking in the direction of 'the risk-management economics of climate change', and that they should take seriously the enormous uncertainties in all current appreciations of climate risks and the very real risk of catastrophic consequences of climate change, particularly at higher temperatures (Stern, 2008: 7).[13] Developing this latter line of argumentation, Stern gave credit

13 Curiously, in his more recent (2016) *Science* commentary, Stern appears to have all but forgotten his harsh fundamental critique of marginalistic optimization IAMs (Stern, 2008), and instead calls for 'better' IAMs which, in his view, manage to incorporate risks and costs in a more satisfactory manner.

to Harvard economist Martin Weitzman for having begun to explore such an approach to climate economics.

Weitzman was one of the most prominent of the economists who partially sided with Nordhaus in the critique of the Stern Review, and he particularly focused his criticism on what he saw to be the elitist and paternalistic stance that Stern had assumed in setting the SDR arbitrarily low. According to Weitzman, Stern's stance predetermined the outcome of the analysis in favor of strong immediate action in a somewhat dishonest way (Weitzman, 2007). In the remainder of his review, Weitzman proceeded to raise a more fundamental question: was the form of modeling that underpins the Stern Review and most other mainstream climate-economy research actually of any help in grappling with such a complex problem as global warming?

In a later paper, Weitzman (2009a) formulated what he considered to be a mathematically rigorous specification of the 'Dismal Theorem', which claims to illustrate that the marginal utility of GHG abatement is unlimited, or at least close to unlimited. The reasons for his conclusion are two-fold: a) the probability of extreme climate change is relatively high, and b) the potential economic cost of extreme climate change is practically unbounded, as it approaches the limits of human survival as a species and contains global economic collapse and the risk of death to hundreds of millions of people. In the face of such profound risks, Weitzman contended, marginalistic cost-benefit analyses (CBAs) attempting to fine-tune an optimal pricing of carbon, such as those offered by Nordhaus and other IAM modelers, are completely meaningless. What is crucial, instead, is the development of strategies against worst-case scenarios, as a form of 'insurance thinking', rather than trying to fine-tune according to 'most likely' cases and then attempting to maximize utility (i.e., economic growth) based on these cases.

The gist of Weitzman's argument, therefore, was that it is irresponsible for any economic analyst to overlook this real risk of catastrophe, even if it is currently difficult to calculate its exact probability. The problem with current optimization approaches is that they build upon existing knowledge regarding prior conditions, primarily based on historical records of the effects of relatively small variations in temperature on such factors as agriculture and human health. Weitzman notes, however, that nobody knows the degree to which the projections that can be extrapolated from such historical data will actually hold in a potential globally warmed world, given that humanity has never experienced the level of concentration of GHGs that it may have to confront. Weitzman

concluded that given these 'deep structural uncertainties' that allow for potentially unlimited economic damage, one cannot focus on optimization and a supposedly 'correct' setting of the SDR. Rather, it is necessary to start calculating the potential economic costs of climate 'insurance' against worst-case scenarios, by stabilizing GHG concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that qualified experts believe would be within reasonably safe boundaries.

Nordhaus's (2009) comment on the Dismal Theorem, which in turn can be read as a direct criticism of his own work, gives some credit to the novel insights it offers to economic modeling, but downplays its relevance for the economics of climate change. According to Nordhaus, Weitzman's conclusions are unnecessarily alarmistic and overstated, and the dominant IAM-based CBA methods for analyzing optimal CO_2 pricing should be considered generally sound and reliable.[14]

Weitzman further developed his line of reasoning in a direct rejoinder to Nordhaus (Weitzman, 2009b), suggesting that Nordhaus's response was off the mark, in that it failed to grapple with the more fundamental implications of Weitzman's argument. After all, it is common knowledge that computer-driven simulations, such as climate-economy IAMs, are 'dependent upon the core assumptions of the model inside the computer'. The aim of his idea of the Dismal Theorem was to sow 'a few seeds of doubt that the "standard" CBA of climate change is fairly representing structural uncertainties, and therefore its conclusions might be more shaky than is commonly acknowledged' (Weitzman, 2009b: 2). After having reviewed all these uncertainties, and how the models – according to Weitzman – fail to account for them, he finally concluded that

> the economics of climate change consists of a very long chain of tenuous inferences fraught with big uncertainties in every link: beginning with unknown base-case GHG emissions; then compounded by big uncertainties about how available policies and policy levers will transfer into actual GHG emissions; compounded by big uncertainties about how GHG-flow emissions accumulate via the carbon cycle into GHG stock concentrations; compounded by big uncertainties about how and when GHG stock concentrations translate into global mean temperature changes; compounded by big uncertainties about

14 Notably, Nordhaus turned Weitzman's critique of 'standard' CBA analyses of climate change around, and in turn accused Weitzman of positing unwarranted, unrealistic assumptions.

> how global mean temperature changes decompose into regional climate changes; compounded by big uncertainties about how adaptations to, and mitigations of, climate-change damages are translated into utility changes at a regional level; compounded by big uncertainties about how future regional utility changes are aggregated – and then how they are discounted – to convert everything into expected-present-value global welfare changes. The result of this lengthy cascading of big uncertainties is a reduced form of truly extraordinary uncertainty about the aggregate welfare impacts of catastrophic climate change. (Weitzman, 2009b: 7–8)

Weitzman asserted that none of the uncertainties outlined in this quotation are adequately dealt with by the 'standard CBA' of climate change. According to him, this issue needs to be recognized as a serious problem. In rounding off his argument, he noted that his skepticism regarding the established methods of climate economics might come across as threateningly 'anti-scientific' and 'anti-economic' to mainstream economists, and that his conclusions may be 'frustrating for economists', given that 'we make a living from plugging rough numbers into simple models and reaching specific conclusions (more or less) on the basis of these numbers' (Weitzman, 2009b: 13). From such a broad 'economist common-sense' perspective, it may well be that '[t]he "standard" CBA appears to offer a constructive ongoing scientific-economic research program for generating ever more precise outputs from ever more precise inputs' (Weitzman, 2009b: 13). In light of this, Weitzman conceded, '[i]t is threatening for us economists to admit that constructive "can do" climate-change CBA may be up against some limitations on the ability of quantitative analysis to give robust advice' (Weitzman, 2009b: 13). Even if it is 'uncomfortable for economists', Weitzman concluded,

> if this is the way things are with the economics of climate change, then this is the way things are – and non-robustness to subjective assumptions is an inconvenient truth to be lived with rather than a fact to be denied or evaded just because it looks less scientifically objective in CBA. (Weitzman, 2009b: 13)

As a consequence of these accounted-for circumstances, Weitzman argued, economists should be more upfront with policymakers, politicians, and the public, telling them that there is a real danger of overconfidence in the objective status of climate-change CBA results, seeing how fundamentally influenced they are by incorporated subjective judgments. Therefore, economists 'should not pursue a narrow, superficially crisp, analysis by blowing away the low-probability high-impact catastrophic scenarios as if this is a

necessary price we must pay for the worthy goal of giving answers and advice to policy makers', and therefore need to avoid succumbing to '[a]n artificial infatuation with crispness [that] is likely to make our analyses go seriously askew and undermine the credibility of what we say by effectively marginalizing the very possibilities that make climate change so grave in the first place' (Weitzman, 2009b: 14). Rather, economists should better explain the enormity of the unprecedented structural uncertainties, and must also, given the very real possibility of catastrophic effects of global warming upon human wellbeing, recognize that Nordhaus's climate-policy ramp constitutes an unacceptably risky wager, which amounts to 'gambling on a midcourse-correction learning mechanism […] relying more on an article of faith than on an evidence-based scientific argument' (Weitzman, 2009b: 14).

The debate between Weitzman and Nordhaus was rehearsed in a symposium published a couple of years later in the *Review of Environmental Economics and Policy* (Nordhaus, 2011; Weitzman, 2011). The third participant in this symposium was the celebrated MIT micro-economist Robert Pindyck (2011). In the following years, Pindyck came to launch what amounted to a full-frontal attack and scathing dismissal of the entire mainstream approach to the economics of climate change. In a later text (Pindyck, 2013a) he presented an argument similar in spirit, albeit not in tone, to Weitzman's – suggesting that many of the critical parameters that crucially determine the optimal prices of carbon coming out of IAMs are not only at present 'unknown' but belong within 'the realm of the unknowable' in every practical sense.

In another paper, Pindyck (2013b) asked the question that was already in his title: 'Climate change policy: what do the models tell us?' and answered it with the first two words of the abstract: 'Very little'. He went on to declare that the IAMs employed for climate-economic analysis have crucial flaws that make them 'close to useless' as tools for policy analysis, because certain inputs (e.g., the discount rate) are 'arbitrary', but have huge effects on the SCC estimates the models produce; that the models' descriptions of the impact of climate change are 'completely ad hoc, with no theoretical or empirical foundation'; and that the models 'can tell us nothing about the most important driver of the SCC, the possibility of a catastrophic climate outcome' – after which he concludes that 'IAM-based analyses of climate policy create a perception of knowledge and precision, but that perception is illusory and misleading' (Pindyck 2013b: 860).

In a later paper, he sharpened his critique even further, claiming that

> [b]ecause the modeler has so much freedom in choosing functional forms, parameter values, and other inputs, the model can be used to obtain almost any result one desires, and thereby legitimize what is essentially a subjective opinion about climate policy. (Pindyck, 2015: 1)

Consequently, he contended, 'calling these models "close to useless" is generous', and he challenged the entire IAM-modeling enterprise as lacking in scientific honesty, 'in that it creates a veneer of scientific legitimacy that is misleading' (Pindyck, 2015: 3). He concluded that IAM modeling must not guide policy decisions on climate change and that 'environmental economists should be ashamed to claim that IAMs can forecast climate change and its impact, or tell us what the SCC is' (Pindyck, 2015: 13).

Epistemic wagers and enactments of overflow in the economics of climate change

Franck Cochoy once suggested that '[r]eality will always overflow (or escape) the webs of reference that are supposed to account for it', which means that the data on which researchers base their representations of said reality 'are often not enough to support the results fully, yet they must present them as such', given that established research norms render any other position effectively 'taboo' (Cochoy, 2013: 275). Observing that the scientific emperor is usually only half-dressed – for example, by bringing attention to the epistemic wagers performed by fellow scientists – is, understandably, a sensitive act that is often avoided. Nevertheless, open debates regarding the acceptability of such wagers sometimes erupt within a scientific community, as the case described in this chapter illustrates.

The debates regarding the applicability of CBA and IAMs in climate-economic modeling highlight the more general question of how every conscious decision to ignore a known source of uncertainty in a modeling enterprise in itself constitutes an epistemic wager to the effect that the model will nonetheless be helpful in representing the phenomenon it aims at depicting in a productively simplified form by 'cutting through the clutter' (see also Dan-Cohen, 2016). Although all parties to these debates admit that it is necessary to posit some assumptions as a basis for any economic analysis, a number of prominent economists argue that in the case of the 'standard CBA'

of mainstream climate economics, the assumptions employed are simply too uncertain and speculative to be considered scientifically sound. Relating to the use of IAMs in climate-economic modeling, one can paraphrase the earlier quotation from Martin Weitzman and conclude that it appears as if Pareto-optimizing CBA of the economic effects of climate change is built upon a number of huge epistemic wagers regarding the natural-science characteristics of global warming. These are further compounded by huge epistemic wagers regarding the social and economic effects of this warming. Taken together, they amount to a cascading enormous epistemic wager to the effect that the models can productively represent the economic costs of future climate change under various conditions; and further, that they can be relied upon to any degree whatsoever as relevant input in establishing an optimal price for CO_2 emissions.

This is a wager that economists such as Martin Weitzman and Robert Pindyck appear unable to subscribe to, as they have argued that these models are based upon excessive assumptions – especially those that uphold the relevance of historical experience of levels of climate damage for the calculation of damage incurred by potentially dramatic and historically unprecedented global temperature increases. They argue that when the enormous scientific uncertainties regarding the effects of climate change are compounded by the potentially existential stakes of global warming, it becomes scientifically irresponsible and morally reprehensible to claim to be able to calculate an optimal level of carbon pricing. Economists such as William Nordhaus, who employ 'standard' CBA of climate change, tend to disagree with the critics, often pleading for a necessary, methodologically induced 'strategic ignorance' of complexities in the modeled processes (see also McGoey, 2012; Dan-Cohen, 2016), according to a show-must-go-on logic that invites further analyses of an interesting 'microphysics of selective knowledge' (Löfgren, 2013).

From an overflow perspective, it appears as if much of the controversy regarding the usefulness of IAMs for climate policy can be understood in terms of enacted *overflows of uncertainty*. It is quite obvious that in the case of assumptions in climate-economy modeling, the inevitable question of 'How much is too much?' highlights an irreducible, albeit not always explicitly addressed, ethical or even moral dimension to each epistemic wager. In this case, the situation is perhaps particularly delicate, given that this is a wager which, if it falls out unfavorably – as Paul Krugman pointed out in the opening quotation – may actually jeopardize the future of life on Earth as we know it.

The case has a further interesting aspect: It clearly illustrates how enactments of overflow depend on simultaneous enactments of frames, such as what is considered to be a beneficial or acceptable level of something – in this case, an acceptable level of uncertainty-induced 'strong' assumptions, simplifications, and related epistemic wagers. The described controversies help reveal otherwise often implicit – and, obviously, conflicting – norms of what constitutes an acceptable level of speculative inference in the practice of mainstream economic scholarship. In summary, I hope that this case will invite readers to pay attention to what could be called a 'politics of overflow': the processes by which overflows are enacted, the potential controversies that can arise as a result of claims of overflows, and the invoked rationales and consequences claimed by conflicting parties. One can safely assume that such debates will have a deeply moral dimension, whether immediately obvious or not.

7
More means less: managing overflow in science publishing

Sabina Siebert, Robert Insall, and Laura M. Machesky

Overflow (also referred to as surplus, excess, or overspill) is the opposite of scarcity. Yet as Czarniawska and Löfgren (2012) noted, overflow can be construed as either positive (more means better) or negative (too much of a good thing). But no matter how it is defined and whose perspective one considers, they contend, overflow must be managed. Earlier studies revealed a variety of practical definitions of overflow and a variety of managing devices and ways of coping with overflow. Acknowledging the value of earlier contributions to the study of overflow and drawing on those insights, in this chapter we examine the phenomenon of overflow in biomedical science publications.

What does overflow in science mean?

We begin by summarizing the findings from our 2015 study published in *eLife* (Siebert, Machesky, and Insall, 2015), in which we identified strong perceptions about various types of overflow in biomedical publications. Our interview accounts were redolent with complaints about various forms of overflow. The scientists we spoke to mentioned the increasing number of words, figures, and tables in the average biomedical science article; the rising expectations of rich data to underpin the publications; and the introduction of new 'mega-journals', such as *PLOS ONE* (23,020 papers published in these journals in 2016). One scientist commented on the 'Figure 7 phenomenon', which symbolized to her a drive to expand papers by adding information that is likely to make them noticeable (Siebert, Machesky, and Insall, 2015).

One reason for many of those overflows, according to our interviewees, was increasing competition for jobs, grants, and prestigious publications, a trend that a number of scientists considered detrimental to science. It can lead to lower morale, we were told, and a general sense among students and postdoctoral fellows that there is little or no chance of becoming a leading researcher in the hypercompetitive environment. Furthermore, the increase in job and grant applicants competing for a relatively stagnant pool of jobs and funds can be perceived as a decrease in funding for science, which lowers morale even further (Bourne, 2013; Alberts et al., 2015). After all, high-impact publications are often used as a measure of scientific achievement, despite many arguments to the effect that it is a flawed measure (Seglen, 1997; Curry, 2012). Publication in 'good' journals is seen as the scientist's primary goal.

The scientists we interviewed perceived the world of academic publishing as a seriously overflowing area. They spoke of the ever-increasing number of manuscripts being submitted to the top-tier journals, making it nearly impossible to publish a study in one of them. Our interviews abounded in such phrases as deluge, flood, mass, and influx. This exponential growth of scientific outputs stands in contrast to the artificial scarcity of prestigious publication outlets (Young, Ioannidis, and Al-Ubaydli, 2008; Eisen, 2011). The scientists we spoke to also commented on a rapid proliferation of journals of 'questionable quality'.

According to the interviewees, this increase in submissions was caused partially by an influx of scientists from countries that have not been known historically for biomedical research. What proportion of the exponential growth of outputs comes from these newcomers is not known to us, but this was a common perception among our interviewees.

The results of our study led us to conclude that scientists and policymakers need to be made aware of this common perception of overflow and the potential problems it causes to science. We believe that an understanding of this phenomenon may also underlie some of the reported increases in fraudulent behavior among scientists, as discussed by Steen and his colleagues (Steen, 2011; Steen, Casadevall, and Fang, 2013). When the exponential growth of science is considered, it may be that a reported increase in paper retractions is caused by an increase in the total number of papers published, rather than by an increase in fraud.

As many fingers pointed to the world of publishing, we set out to take a closer look at this world, this time exploring the perspective

of journal editors. Our goal was to assess the perceived overflow with their help and discover whether the number of submitted manuscripts is really increasing, and, if so, how the editors deal with the increase. We wanted to learn about the structure and governance of science publishing and how publishers and editors manage the perceived overflow.

Methods

We interviewed 14 editors and one publisher of journals in areas related to the biomedical sciences. The editors were either practicing scientists working in research labs who were engaged in editorial activities as part of their jobs, or professional editors with science education – usually a PhD – employed by the publisher. All but two journals represented by these editors were listed on Thomson Reuters' scientific list of impact factors, and none of the journals was listed in Jeffrey Beall's List of Predatory Journals and Publishers (more about these later). The impact factor of their journals varied from IF 2 to over IF 30.

We asked the editors if the number of publications in the field covered by their journal was increasing or decreasing over time. If so, by how much, and when had they noticed this trend? How big was the increase/decrease per year? We also asked about competition among journals for submissions, and the main reasons why a scientist chooses to submit a paper to a particular journal.

Apart from interviewing journal editors, we tried to collect some information on submission numbers to journals over the past 10 years. This task was more difficult than we imagined, as numerous editors considered these data commercially sensitive and declined to reveal them. Only six editors or publishers agreed to provide their submission numbers. We were also able to obtain submission numbers for *Nature*, as these data are publicly available online. Some editors provided us with the submission numbers but declined our invitation for an interview; others agreed to be interviewed, but would not share their submission numbers.

To measure the overflow of publications, we analyzed PubMed's (2017) informative research output index, counting the number of indexed publications between 1900 and 2015 (either in total, or for specific journals) and plotted them using Prism.[1]

1 https://www.graphpad.com/scientific-software/prism/.

Science at the point of saturation

Before proceeding with our diagnosis and analysis of overflow in science, we go back 50 years to the 1960s, when a British historian of science, Derek de Solla Price, predicted that the rapid expansion of science would one day reach a point of saturation. In his 1963 book *Little science, big science*, he speculated that the social organization of science and quality-control systems would have to be adapted to accommodate the exponential growth of 'Big Science' – the term he used to describe 'the large-scale character of modern science, new and shining and all-powerful'. The Big Scientist, in turn, is part of an intellectual elite in Washington or Boston, and research corporations are seeking whatever the Big Scientist produces. The Little Scientist, on the other hand, is a 'long-haired genius, moldering in an attic or basement workshop, despised by society as a nonconformist, existing in a state of near poverty, motivated by the flame burning within' (de Solla Price, 1963: 2).

De Solla Price noted that some scientists are critical of Big Science and look back nostalgically at a Little Science that was more elitist and, consequently, more manageable. He claimed that science had grown exponentially, its rate of growth being proportional to the size of the population or to the magnitude already achieved: the bigger a thing, the faster it grows. Some of the consequences of this growth are still noticeable 50 years later: loss of personal contact among researchers in the same field, a lack of cohesion in scientific communities, development of 'objective measurements' of quality, and an erosion of idealism that resulted from economic and commercial pressures (Saltelli, Ravetz, and Funtowicz, 2016). For the Little Scientist, science was a vocation, de Solla Price contended; for the Big Scientist, it has become a career, albeit an insecure one.

Is there really overflow of publications? An attempt at diagnosis

Was de Solla Price right in his prediction of exponential growth? Looking first at the overall number of research outputs captured on PubMed, the plotted line indicates that the increase was slow until the end of the Second World War; but after 1945, scientific research experienced steep, exponential growth, passing a million publications per year in 2011 (see Figure 7.1).

Replotted on a logarithmic scale, these data reveal a two-stage growth in recent years. Between the late 1960s and 2000, the number

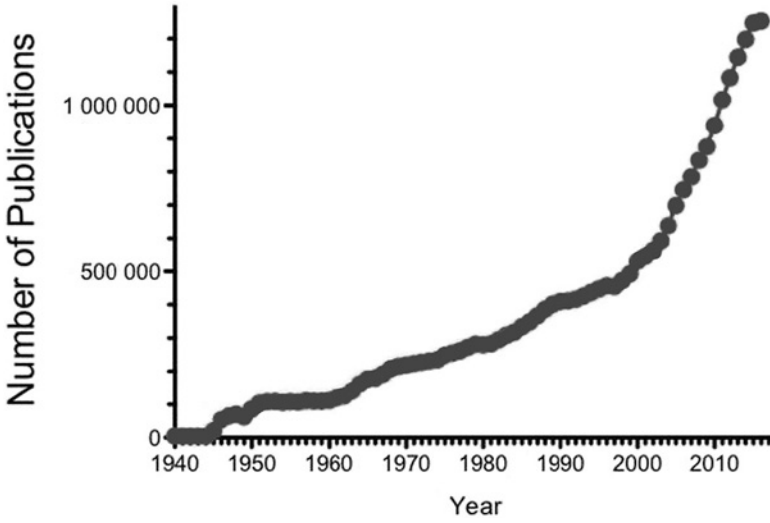

Figure 7.1 Numbers of indexed scientific publications since 1940

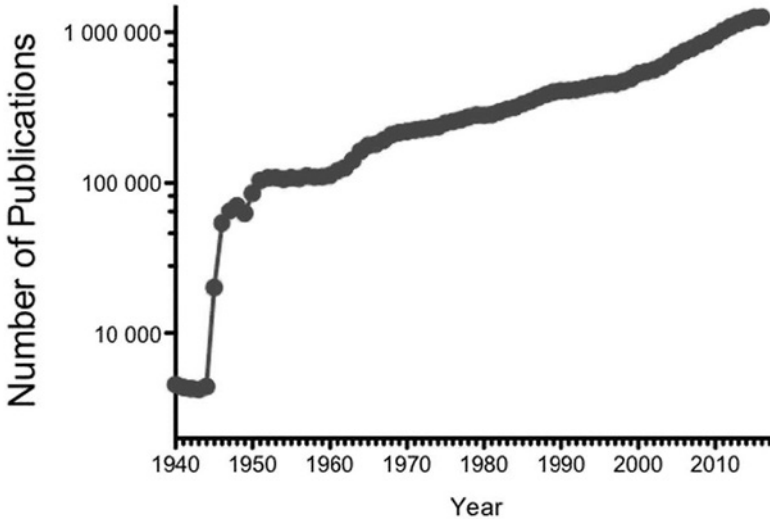

Figure 7.2 Numbers of indexed scientific publications since 1940 (logarithmic plot)

of publications doubled approximately every 14 years, but more recently the rate has increased even further, doubling approximately every 12 years (see Figure 7.2).

In 2015, Ware and Mabe (2015) estimated that the number of articles published annually increased at the rate of 3% a year, whereas the number of journals grew steadily at the rate of 3.5% per year. Although some of the increases may be explained by more thorough indexing over time, there is still real growth visible. One explanation lies in an explosion in the production of and demand for academic research in the postwar years – a demand for which scientific societies were no longer able to provide enough publication venues (Fox, 2015). This is when commercial publishers entered the field and soon dominated the journal market. More recently, automated ('bibliometric') counting of publications has come to dominate the assessment of scientists, also contributing to the increase in publication numbers.

The figures presented here are reflected in the perceptions of journal editors. One editor we interviewed, for example, commented on the geographical expansion of biomedical science to include submissions from Asian countries, such as China or India:

> The field of science has expanded exponentially. […] Back in those days we didn't ever think about a paper being from China or India, but now we do. And now, as journal editors, we need to appeal to authors in those countries, but we also need to make sure that our journal stays solid with a good reputation and it doesn't publish poor science. So, in other words, there are more authors to sort through to make sure they're [laughs] good and honest. And I just think it's too many scientists and too many journals worldwide.

Predatory journals – harmful or harmless noise?

Accompanying the overall rise in the number of indexed publications has been the rapid rise of what Beall (2015) has called *predatory journals*. He compiled an online black list of journals with several characteristics in common: they have fake impact factors, for example, and they conduct no or very light-touch peer review that allows low-quality research to be published online within one week – all for a modest fee paid by the author – usually USD 100–200 (EUR 85–170). Beall's list developed into a significant initiative, widely discussed and used by scientific communities to verify the legitimacy of journals. Along with a regular updating of his list, Beall specified criteria for inclusion on the list, and even initiated a formal process

for removal from the list, which involved an external board of advisors (Bohannon, 2015). Being removed from Beall's black list was almost as difficult as getting onto the 'good' list: Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Reports. The list of predatory journals contained 1294 titles, and it was widely used as a way of telling 'good' journals from 'bad' ones when, unexpectedly, in early 2017, the list disappeared. Beall is said to have removed it from the Internet and refused to explain why. This mysterious disappearance triggered various speculations about possible threats against Beall, including lawsuits and direct pressure on his employers (Chwala, 2017).

A more sensitive issue relates to the geographical regions where the predatory journals originate. Shen and Björk (2015) analyzed the journals on Beall's list and found that the regional distribution of both the publishers and authors is highly skewed. Many predatory publishers are based in developing countries in Asia – 27% of them in India. Furthermore, the authors who publish in these journals come primarily from the same regions, 75% from Asia or Africa. India leads the list with 35% of the authors (the count was of authors rather than publications).

But if Shen and Björk were correct in their analysis, and the authors who publish in the predatory journals come primarily from the regions where these journals are published, why should the Global North[2] be concerned about the rise of predatory journals? Martin Parker (2017) advanced one explanation. In his commentary on Beall's list, he argued that scientists from countries without rich traditions in molecular and biomedical science – the Global South – are vulnerable, desperate, and forced to publish 'rubbish', which consequently damages the scientific record. But, in his view, 'good' journals sometimes publish rubbish too, and the difference between the two is that submissions from academics from the Global North are rejected more often.

In practice, predatory journals are a nuisance, because they flood researchers' inboxes with invitations to submit their works, to review manuscripts, or to serve on their editorial boards. This may be why scientists experience overflow through these spam e-mails that clutter e-mail folders. According to one of the editors, predatory journals simply 'create a noise':

> There's really a lot of them […] if they were published, it would add literally nothing to our knowledge base and it does create noise. You

2 The North–South divide is a political, socio-economic divide between the richer, developed countries in the Global North and the poorer, less developed countries in the Global South.

> do have to read them to see that there's nothing really in there […] So I've somewhat moved my position on this – that everything should be published […] Now I'm not absolutely sure that's right.

When we asked, 'Is it a harmful or harmless noise', the interviewee answered that most of it is harmless noise, or 'relatively harmless noise', but that there are some publications – and not necessarily articles in predatory journals – which are more harmful. Some of them, the editor told us, are in the high-profile journals in which 'people are having to exaggerate or select their data to make a simple story that gets published in a high-impact journal'.

But harmless noise for the Global North may be harmful noise for the Global South. For 'rich-country researchers' (Bohannon, 2015), these journals are a nuisance that creates the perception of overflow. For science in developing countries, the expansion of predatory journals may have wider consequences. Beall (2015) has argued that these predatory journals were damaging existing research cultures through the corruption of academic evaluation. Similarly, Harzing and Adler (2016) have suggested that some predatory journals appear to gain prominence in the scholarly landscape, bringing their owners significant profits. And Bohannon (2015) has reported that predatory publishers' share of the market currently amounts to USD 75 million (EUR 63.7 million).

According to the editors we interviewed, predatory journals offer publishers a market opportunity and provide market space for manuscripts that could not make it to the upper tiers of the publishing tower. In this respect, predatory journals may be seen as a practical solution to overflow, as they provide the final net 'catching the dross':

> *Interviewer:* And what do you think happens with the papers that you reject?
>
> *Editor:* Well they will eventually be published because, you know, with all the online journals mushrooming, you can publish whatever you want nowadays.

The editors we spoke to 'would not dream' of publishing in these journals, and they actively discourage their colleagues and PhD students from doing so. As one editor said, 'You must be desperate to submit to one of these journals.' Another editor agreed with Jeffrey Beall's assertion that predatory journals create overflow; but worse, they damage the scientific record.

One could pose a question: 'Why do scientists publish in predatory journals?' We hazard an explanation: The number of scientists

worldwide is increasing, which may produce an increase in both 'good' and 'not-so-good' science. Because some of the newcomers may be unsuccessful with regard to publishing their work in the high-tier journals, they are willing to pay for publication online, in hopes that their ideas are significant enough for the world to notice them. The Internet has leveled the playing field and destroyed elitism – for better or worse. More science is available online, therefore, meaning that scientists have to sift more diligently to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Overflow within journals

Having established that there is evidence of increasing numbers of publications overall, we attempted to diagnose potential overflow in individual journals. Our goal was to discover whether the number of submitted papers is increasing. As mentioned, some journals are open about their submission figures and their publication rates. *Nature*, for example, provides its figures on its Author Guidelines website, which we partly reproduced in Figure 7.1, disclosing that the number of submissions in 1997 was 7,680, rising steadily to 10,952 in 2013. Its guidelines state: '*Nature* has space to publish only 8% or so of the 200 papers submitted each week, hence its selection criteria are rigorous. Many submissions are declined without being sent for review.' Thus competition and impact are maintained by setting limits on the publication space. Noteworthy in this quote is the expression 'has *space* to publish only …'.

The artificial scarcity of publication slots is primarily caused by editors' concerns about quality control, but also about impact factor. Impact factor is calculated by averaging the number of citations of all of papers published, so those rare, extremely highly cited papers (including review articles) that contribute hugely to the impact of the extremely high-impact journals would be canceled out if the publication numbers were to increase greatly. So increasing the number of published papers may have disastrous consequences for impact factors. One editor commented on the drop of *PLOS ONE*'s impact factor after the journal began to publish vast numbers of papers every year. A considerable share of the market was then captured by *Scientific Reports*, which may now be experiencing a similar decline in impact factor following a greatly increased number of published articles.

To verify this observation, we conducted our own analysis of the publicly available data on the number of papers published by

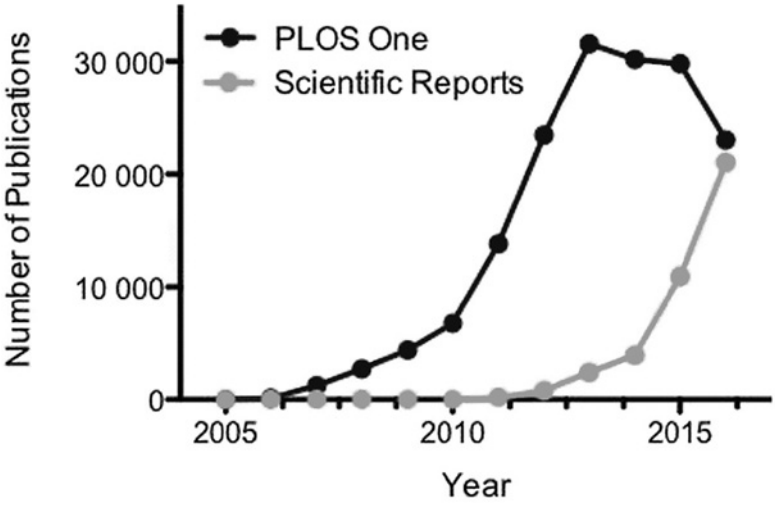

Figure 7.3 Publications in two open-access journals

these two journals: *PLOS ONE* and *Scientific Reports*. Indeed, *PLOS ONE* reduced article output from its peak of 2013, and one analysis suggests that this reduction will increase the journal impact factor (Davis, 2016). In contrast, *Scientific Reports* has maintained the increase in the number of published papers.

PLOS ONE was created to deal with the overflow from the highly selective journals and to offer a more level playing field to scientists who may have been excluded for reasons other than a lack of sound and rigorous scientific results to communicate. The huge number of articles published (Figure 7.3) attests to the great success of this model, and it inspired the creation of many other similar journals, such as *Scientific Reports*, *Biology Open*, and *Open Biology*. These journals seek to review papers rigorously on the basis of soundness and scientific merit, without requiring the level of scientific novelty or depth of mechanistic insight required by high-impact journals. Although this is a great goal, it requires a large number of rigorous peer referees to be drawn from the established scientific community, and hence probably contributes to the perceived overflow.

Even though the number of papers published overall is rising, none of the editors we spoke to reported feeling overwhelmed, which seems to stand in contrast to the perceptions of scientists.

Even the most established, highly ranked journals do not appear to suffer from an excessive number of submissions. This is partly due to the self-selection of authors, who measure their abilities and aspirations against the requirements of the journals, realistically aiming for journals from lower tiers. One editor from one of the most highly ranked journals commented:

> For many of our journals, there's a lot of self-selection that goes on. People don't send us stuff unless they think it's good in the first place. So, you know, we have a very high standard […] So would I like to see more papers? Yes. But would I like it to double? Not really, because I'm perfectly happy with the level that it's at.

Editors of a few other journals who shared their statistics with us also noticed an increase in submissions, but it was not always a smooth upward trajectory that they observed. Rather, they had identified peaks and troughs, sometimes caused by the emergence of new journals in closely related disciplines stealing a share of their market. Efficiency of manuscript processing also affects the popularity of journals among authors. The most highly ranked journals receive over 10,000 manuscripts annually – some 50 manuscripts a day at peak times.

One editor commented on the uneven distribution of journal submissions: 'It really varies among the journals. Some are going up. I don't think any of them are falling, at least not very much, but some of them are rising and some of them are not.' The blame for this uneven distribution has been attributed to the dominance of the big players, *Cell*, *Science*, and *Nature*:

> The publishing world is in big, big trouble because those two groups – Nature Publishing Group and Cell Press – they have the most prestigious journals and […] they are squeezing out the competition. All of the other impact factors are going down. All of their impact factors are unbelievably high, and so all the other journals are getting squeezed.

Although some editors complained about the monopoly of the big three brands, the editor of one of them admitted that there is still competition between them, and a lot of effort goes into publishing 'the very best'. This editor indicated that rather than 'chasing the impact factor', their journal is interested in publishing 'influential research'.

One way of breaking the dominance of the big publishers is for funders to require that all outputs be publicly available – through

open access, for instance. Open access is a contentious but rapidly evolving phenomenon. Many commentators have been scathing about the established model, by which science publishers retain the copyright of the paper and the data it contains, and the reader needs to pay to download a paper. This has led a number of governments and funding bodies to require that all publications deriving from their work must be freely accessible to anyone who wishes to read them. In this new model, the finances of science publication are reversed; whereas previously, publishers' costs were recouped mainly by charging readers to access the final publication, now the publishers must be paid upfront for the expense of editing, refereeing, communicating, and archiving research. This model has been applied in different ways; some fully open-access journals have been established as beneficial, non-profit establishments, whereas others are fully commercial. Obviously these two groups are subject to different pressures. Another complicating arrangement is open-access papers published for a fee in otherwise closed journals. And in the fourth variant, a legitimate, highly ranked journal makes some papers free in perpetuity without charging their authors (for example, *Science* makes public-health papers free in perpetuity).

When applied appropriately, open access can democratize science and increase participation and the distribution of results. The upfront nature of the payments has led to difficulties, however. The additional money transferred to commercial publishers has been unexpectedly large and has led to criticism about 'double dipping' by journals that charge authors for open access to their publications, then charge libraries for subscriptions.

Although many fully open-access journals, including *PLOS Biology* and *eLife*, have gained prestige, the attempts to break the commercial stranglehold of the big brands have so far failed – at least according to one editor:

> The main interest for me would be all the open access movement, all of the Wellcome Trust and Howard Hughes funding, *eLife*, and trying to break the back of all the dominance of *Nature*, *Cell*, and *Science*. It all failed, and we're heading for this worst of all worlds […]. We still haven't broken the back of the impact factor, so the impact factor totally dominates everything. But we are now paying for it, because God knows how much Wellcome Trust is pouring down the tubes in paying for open access. And for what? What does open access buy us? Is it really true that there's loads of people reading these papers who don't have access?

Any fluctuations in submissions are easily accommodated by the journals:

> How do we manage changes in submissions? I mean, if we see significant increases in submissions, then we will look at increasing staffing to accommodate that, you know, because we're run by internal editor. I think other journals do the same thing – there's only so much, I mean. It comes back down to the volumes, and there's only so much workload that an editor can handle and still do the job; so I think that would be what we would do.

Even when the number of submissions increases, editors are reluctant to increase the number of publication slots and instead increase their rejection rates:

> Quality standards. I want to keep a certain level of quality, and that means that only a certain proportion of the papers that get submitted actually reaches that bar. […] we'd definitely be encouraged to increase [the number of published papers] if we felt that the papers were of sufficient quality. But that's really the main criterion. I mean, we want the journal to be high quality […] I wouldn't go up to like 14, 15 papers a month if I didn't feel, if I felt, I had to compromise quality to do that.

Managing overflow by rejecting papers is at times a risky business. One editor admitted receiving threats of lawsuits from disappointed authors, or letters of complaint:

> We are now very, very careful in the assessment of papers, and I always insist now on having an independent person on at least one and if possible two that assess […] So for example [some authors] are very proud, so when you reject one of their papers, you often get very nasty letters, how famous and wonderful they are, and how little we understand about research [laughs].

Some journals deal with the overflow of good-quality papers by passing them on, with the authors' permission, to what is sometimes referred to as their 'sister journals'. For example, *Cell*, *Nature*, and *Science* have launched more branded journals and designed a system for cascading articles from one tier to the next. With the authors' permission, *Science* transfers papers to their sister journals: *Science Advances*, *Science Robotics*, *Science Immunology*, or *Science Signalling*. The Company of Biologists' journals – *Journal of Cell Science*, *Development*, *Journal of Experimental Biology*, and *Disease Models & Mechanisms* – offer to transfer some of their rejected papers to *Biology Open,* an open-access

journal that provides 'a welcoming home for papers and helping to avoid additional rounds of submission and review' (*Biology Open* webpage), which was created with the explicit goal of publishing papers that are scientifically sound and rigorous, but not groundbreaking. Some journals such as *PLOS Biology* also allow 'review transfers', whereby a transferred paper is passed on to another journal, together with the original reviews. The explicit goal of this system is to help authors find a place to publish their paper as quickly and smoothly as possible. It also makes good business sense, because the system allows publishers to capture a greater market share. Some of the editors we interviewed raised concerns that this system strengthens the monopoly of the biggest brands, as the sister journals soak up the rejected papers. One editor complained:

> The NPG [Nature Publishing Group] and the Cell Press journals, they've twigged […] all of this a while ago, and so they now are launching journals at every level. So when you submit your paper to *Cell* or to *Developmental Cell* or *Cell Reports*, you know there's a cascade down all in-house. Because, of course, every paper, if you get a paper, review it, and reject it, the financial model tells you you've not made any money, you've spent money but you've not made any. If you can cascade it, […] it gets published, then in your open-access journal that's a bit lower, but you now *monetize* the submission.

The authors are said to take these trickle-down arrangements for granted. As one editor explained:

> I have found that a lot of my colleagues will submit to *Nature*, knowing that they'll probably get it into *Nature Communications*, and because it has that *Nature* name on it. […] That worries me for journals like ours, because we're losing some of our papers to them.

So not all journals experience increasing submission numbers, and the journals that have experienced significant underflow are usually mid-tier, specialist journals (mostly with impact factors under 10) which see their share of the market being taken by the dominant top-end journals from the Nature Publishing Group, Science, or Cell Press families. One editor pessimistically commented: 'The future of this market is fighting for submissions.' Another editor suggested that even an upward change of the impact factor does not affect submissions, and having an impact factor in the first place makes a big difference to whether or not they get submissions.

Peer review: an instrument for managing overflow

The main instrument for managing manuscript flow in journals is peer review, which, despite its detractors (e.g. Eisen, 2011), is perceived as the gold standard that allows a separation between science and hearsay. Yet in our earlier study (Siebert, Machesky, and Insall, 2015), we identified some scientists' concerns about the capacity of the peer-review process to cope with the number of scientific outputs requiring verification and quality assurance. We argued that with an overflow, the quality and objectivity of peer review are being damaged and posed a question: 'Should peer review be updated to cope with the demands imposed by the possible overflow, or perhaps, more radically, should it be disposed of altogether?'

When we asked journal editors about that issue, they spoke uniformly in defense of peer review. Overall, peer review does work, and it is still the best way of verifying the quality of papers:

> [Peer review] works. Honestly, I think it works fine. […] people kind of complain about it, but I actually feel it works pretty well. Is it perfect? No. But can I think of something that would be markedly better? No.

This sentiment recurred in all interviews, and none of the editors we spoke to advocated an alternative to peer review:

> I think that you know that there are lots of discussions about how you could get people to do it, you know, post things online and get people to comment spontaneously. But everybody always says that they don't have time to read even what's already out there, so you're not going to get the same level of scrutiny. It's just not going to happen.

Even small modifications to peer review – anonymizing reviews and making them publicly available (*Nature*, 2015), for example – were also dismissed. As one editor suggested, that change would damage reviewers' good will:

> You could easily make enemies in your field of research, not by doing an unjust review, but because some people feel very attached to their very own research. And when you address some points of weakness, it's not very kindly received. […] it's just not in the interest of a reviewer.

Another editor spoke in favor of anonymous reviewers:

> I personally feel the anonymity aspect is important, because it allows people to be honest without fear of reprisal, and editors have a role in making sure that people aren't being inappropriately critical.

One modification to the peer-review system that has been praised is 'the *eLife* model' of reviewer consultation. After the reviewers send in their reports, they learn who the other reviewers are, and after consultation, they reach a joint decision and produce one set of recommendations. *Science* has a similar cross-review system, whereby reviewers of a paper are shown the other reviewers' reports and invited to update or amend their own assessments of the paper accordingly. These models are seen as more transparent and constructive, although they can be more time-consuming and do not directly address the problem of overflow in the peer-review system.

Overflow is sometimes a problem in areas in which it is difficult to find enough qualified reviewers. Some journals – usually the journals with lower impact factors – struggle looking for reviewers. Highly ranked journals appear to be less likely to have that problem, because reviewing for them is said to bring scientists prestige, as an editor of one of these journals confirmed:

> We benefit from the fact that the journal is high quality and the papers are interesting. I think you know that we don't usually have trouble finding people to review our papers, because their willingness to do it is quite high.

These journals usually recruit their reviewers from the pool of laboratory heads and principal investigators rather than postdoctoral researchers or PhD students. One editor said: 'It should be a peer review, so I don't want to involve my postdocs to look into it.' Other editors, especially of the journals from the lower end, were more inclusive in their selection of reviewers and utilized younger colleagues. In their view, senior lab heads would not agree to review papers for lower-level journals. One editor strongly advocated that reviewers should be paid, on the assumption that it would solve the problem of potential deficits and increase the quality of reviews. However, problems involved in paying referees have prevented the idea from being a success. A few other editors recommended other ways of rewarding their reviewers – notifying their institutions about their good citizenship, offering 'thank you' lunches, or simply reaching out to them to personally to say thank you. One recommendation, which recurred in a number of accounts, was to introduce training for reviewers. Like writing papers or grant applications, reviewing papers is a specific skill that is often taken for granted and not explicitly taught. Training new reviewers and evaluating them, then, was one suggestion geared to addressing what Eisen (2011) has called the 'peer review crisis'.

The champagne tower of science publishing

In our search for evidence of overflow in science, we concluded that there is exponential growth of publications overall, but that this growth is related to an increase in the number of journals and in submissions to a few broad-scope, open-access journals like *PLOS ONE* and *Scientific Reports*, rather than to massive increases in submissions to most of the individual journals that we analyzed. Some journals see increases in submissions – others do not – and most editors would like to see their numbers rise.

So is overflow in science good or bad? On the one hand, the exponential growth of science publications can be seen as positive. Investment in science in the emerging economies leads to more studies being conducted, and it should mean that scientific progress moves more quickly. On the other hand, overflow can give rise to concerns about the trustworthiness of science. Our interviewees indicated that the more science is produced, the more noise there is in the system, and the more difficult it is to tell what is trustworthy and what is not. Scientists are concerned about the ability of the world of science to govern the quality of the increasing flow of scientific outputs.

The metaphor that we believe best captures overflow in scientific publishing is that of the champagne tower (Figure 7.4). Like the glasses in the tower, scientific journals are organized in tiers, with the most prestigious elite journals at the top (*Cell*, *Science*, *Nature*) and lower-ranked journals at the bottom. In between are various tiers of journals in a decreasing order of their impact factor. The Holy Grail of science is the top glass, as publishing in the top-rated journals guarantees academic positions, grants, and membership of editorial boards. A scientist's career depends on publishing as many papers as possible in the most prestigious journals (Nosek, Spies, and Motyl, 2012). Furthermore, we have been told, publishing in the top journals increases the odds of publication in the top journals in the future.

If the quality of champagne is the same at the top and the bottom of the tower, why does everyone prefer the top glass? Publishing in the top-rated journals has become the yardstick of scientific careers (Schekman, 2013), regarded by many who hold the purse strings as being the ultimate measure of scientific excellence. But these journals maintain the artificial scarcity of spaces. Neal Young and his colleagues (2008) explained this phenomenon well. In their influential article on the 'winner's curse', they compared the idea of artificial scarcity in economics (i.e., restrictions on the provision

Figure 7.4 The champagne tower

of a commodity above that expected from its production cost) to the artificial page limits in prestigious journals. In light of their analysis, print page limits are used as an excuse to justify high rejection rates, as extremely low acceptance rates provide status signals to successful authors. This limitation on publication slots is entirely artificial, they argue. As with online publishing, there is no real need for page limits – both in relation to the length of articles and the number of slots in each issue. As Young et al. summarized their argument:

> The self-correcting mechanism in science is retarded by the extreme imbalance between the abundance of supply (the output of basic science laboratories and clinical investigations) and the increasingly limited venues for publication (journals with sufficiently high impact). […] The scarcity of available outlets is artificial, based on the costs of printing in an electronic age and a belief that selectivity is equivalent to quality. (Young et al., 2008: 1418)

Some authors, especially those who evaluate their own research critically, will send their best work to one of the three top journals and anything they have evaluated less favorably to a lower-ranked journal. Others begin their paper's journey at the top and, if unsuccessful, will aim for a lower tier. Manuscripts that do not find their way into the top journals trickle down the champagne tower, either because their authors resubmit them to the lower-ranked journals or because the editors who rejected them offer to transfer them down to their affiliated journals. Some editors refer to the journals that accept transfers from higher tiers as 'trickle-down' journals, evoking the image of dripping liquid. The realistic view expressed by the editors and scientists is that everything will get published somewhere eventually. Even if it is not champagne, it will not end up on the table.

When considering the trickle-down arrangements between journals, it is worth examining the ownership of the journals, posing the question, 'Who owns the individual glasses in the champagne tower?' The concern expressed by some editors about the middle-tier, specialist journals is that the papers that used to be submitted to their journals now end up in the journals owned by the three big 'brands'. One journal editor commented on the power of the *Nature* brand: '*Nature* is one of the most powerful brands in the world, even more powerful than most fashion brands. People flock to these journals at all costs. The name alone stands for prestige and quality and successes in research.'

We have used a number of possibly contentious labels: Global South, Global North, Big Scientist, Little Scientist, rich-country scientist, and developing-country scientist. None of these labels is precise, because the dividing lines in science do not always follow neat geographical regions, generational lines, or tiers in the structure of scientific establishments. Whatever labels we use, we run the risk of stereotyping. Admittedly, the editors we interviewed at this stage of the project were all from the Global North, and we recognize that speaking to the editors of newly established journals from the Global South may produce a different tale of hegemony and a struggle of survival in the world that favors the established hierarchies of science.

The perspective of some of our interviewees leans toward maintaining the status quo – welcoming the newcomers but worrying about their legitimacy. Others, from journals based on new models of publishing founded on sound rigorous science and fair transparent treatment of authors, have a more optimistic outlook geared toward

changing the system and breaking away from a heavy dependence on journal brands and impact factors. Initiatives such as the open science movement (Open Research Data Taskforce, 2017) or a move toward scientists taking greater control of publishing (Fyfe et al., 2017) are other potential ways of changing the system and making a positive change to the culture of science publishing. Open science may substantially increase the amount of shared research, including disclosure of negative or inconclusive findings. The Internet makes this sharing possible and offers more than one way to communicate new and exciting results. But of course, it creates even greater overflow.

Franck Cochoy (2012) has argued that when overflow happens, it is proof of the failure of management, as management should be channeling flows, not dealing with overflows. The most convincing way of managing overflow in science and verifying quality of published outputs is peer review – the gold standard of quality assurance, which, it seems to us, has obvious capacity limitations. If more papers are produced, more reviewers are needed, and the pool of reviewers does not appear to grow proportionally to the increase in the number of authors. A closer look at the peer-review system, construed as a 'filter failure' (Shirky, 2008), may introduce new ways of managing overflow in science. And reducing the overflow should help to reduce the noise.

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8

Guides and an overflow of choices

Lars Norén and Agneta Ranerup

In *The metropolis and mental life*, Simmel (1903/1950) argued that the division of labor and specialization in growing urban agglomerations increase the opportunities of choice for ordinary citizens. For Simmel, improved choice opportunities were an interesting and positive aspect of urban life, but this favorable attitude toward choice came to be questioned in time. One contributor to this critique was US psychologist Barry Schwartz (2004), who summarized the debate by introducing the notion of the *paradox of choice*. He argued that even if modern urban people have more choice opportunities than ever before, they do not seem to benefit psychologically. Schwartz's idea, together with such notions as the *tyranny of choice* (Salecl, 2010), can be seen as arguments in favor of the thesis of an overflow of choices in contemporary societies.

Despite the critique, new choice opportunities have been added continuously. In the reforms of public sectors that started in the 1970s and 1980s in many Western countries, freedom of choice was one of the most frequently used arguments among politicians. Citizens were given opportunities to make choices within education, healthcare, and pensions; but as soon as such opportunities were introduced, they were criticized. Typical arguments against choice were that people could not choose because of information asymmetry (Greener, 2007), or that people did not want to choose (Clarke, 2007). Ordinary citizens faced problems with this new overflow of choices.

From the late 1990s onward, most politicians decided that one way of dealing with that critique was to launch web-based guides designed to support citizens by providing information before they had to make a choice. Private actors also saw business opportunities and started private web-based guides.

Yet guides for choice are not a new phenomenon. A classic example is the red Michelin restaurant guide that has been helping customers choose restaurants since 1955 (Karpik, 2010; Kwon and Easton, 2010); in time, this guide became web-based. Other well-known examples are TripAdvisor, Booking.com, and PriceRunner. Guides covering key public services are a relatively new phenomenon; they differ from those in the private sector, however, because they regulate the relationship between the state and the citizen. In the study reported here, we were interested in guides to public services, and how they are supposed to help people to deal with the overflow of choice opportunities. We first present the theoretical framework that helped us to classify a number of such guides, and then describe how their originators intended to help the user deal with the overflow of choices.

Market guides: a theoretical point of departure

We differentiate between two basic principles that guide designers can be expected to use, summarized in the notions of choice guides and judgment guides.

Choice guides

Choice guides are market devices, as they are supposed to contribute to the capacity for calculation in a market (Callon and Muniesa, 2005). One option for a designer who is creating a guide is to follow principles of the rational choice model. A first step for such designers is to *isolate* user choice options from their context and present them in a common frame, such as a computer screen (Callon and Muniesa, 2005). In the case of public services, this means that only a limited number of, for example, care centers or schools in a municipality are displayed. Once the options have been isolated, the second step is to provide the means to *examine* and compare them. To accomplish this goal, the guide may present statistics about the performance of schools or care centers. In the third step, designers must create a method by which the user can go from comparisons to a new entity – an ordered list based on a *ranking* procedure, for example.

In summary, when a guide serves as a market device, it is essential that it support user calculation by means of isolation, examination, and ranking/choice. An example can be taken from the online dating industry (Roscoe and Chillas, 2013), in which guides are usually based on a procedure that proposes a relationship between two persons,

including such factors as age and profession. The procedures in a guide can be formalized into an algorithm that creates the basis for a rational choice. According to Orlikowski and Scott, such 'algorithms are step-by-step instructions to achieve a desired result in a finite number of moves. Algorithms act, they do things' (2015: 18).

Algorithms can perform such tasks as ranking, but Woolgar (1990) also argued that the development of a formal choice procedure means configuring the user. Consequently, Callon and Muniesa used the concept of *algorithmic configuration* of a user in a market, for example. This issue is of importance in the context of public services for at least two reasons. The first is that the role of a citizen-consumer of public services (Clarke et al., 2007) is often a new role. In Sweden, users' choices were not common in this sector prior to the 1990s. This novelty means that a new consumer role has to be configured. Second, the role of a citizen-consumer can be seen as a key dimension in the relationship between the state and the citizen, which adds a political dimension to the configuration of the user in this sector (Clarke et al., 2007).

Judgment guides

Karpik (2010) suggested the alternative concept of *judgment device,* arguing that such devices as, for example, a judgment guide are more appropriate in markets for singularities. Such markets trade in non-standardized goods and unique services, in which providers are separated by quality differences and price is less important. This definition is relevant for key public services that are often free at the point of delivery. Karpik argued that the user in these markets wants to find a service that meets personal needs, and not the optimal choice, as described by rational choice theory.

Karpik used the example of the psychoanalysis market, in which the user wants to choose the psychologist who is the best fit, rather than going to someone who was considered by someone else to be optimal. Similar issues may be relevant for key public services – as when pupils and parents want to find a school that meets their general requirements in terms of cheerful atmosphere and results, rather than using the level of grading as the only criterion. Judgment involves a number of activities, and it may be supported by a guide that gives access to peer networks which evaluate provider units and to user networks exploring user experiences (Karpik, 2010). First, 'actors must have access to credible knowledge that can be added to their own store of knowledge' (Karpik, 2010: 49). Second,

relevant service providers must be identified. Finally, a judgment of the options must be conducted. For Karpik, 'judgment is a synthetic act that integrates a plurality of heterogeneous and variably weighted criteria' (2010: 42).

The concept of judgment assumes a qualitative choice based on the user having extensive knowledge. A judgment guide must match a mix of qualitative requirements with a provision of services of a large qualitative variation. This is in contrast to the market guides described in the previous section, which are usually based on simplified assumptions about user preferences, in order to support the user in finding the optimal option. But both types of guides seem to rely on action nets (Czarniawska, 2004) that tie together a number of actions and entities. Thus, a relevant question for a designer of guides is the degree of automation in the connections between actions and entities in the net.

Field material and methods of data collection and analysis

In this chapter, we describe three Swedish public services in which web-based user choice is permitted. We chose a Swedish setting for several reasons. Although Sweden's political majorities have shifted several times since the 1990s, the Swedish public sector has emphasized and supported the principles of New Public Management (NPM), which are perceived as reflecting a more conservative political orientation. NPM promotes market-oriented management of the public sector (Hood, 1995) and tends to view citizens as consumers who are entitled to freedom of choice in public services. Nevertheless, NPM is a controversial policy in Swedish public life, with both critics and supporters.

Swedish citizens currently have a choice in several key public service areas, and government policy documents reveal that large public and private agencies are designing and introducing supportive technologies to increase user choice (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012). One such principle is that funds collected through taxation should follow users (e.g., education vouchers). As a result, approved private and voluntary organizations may establish service providers in locations of their choosing. Under this system, users can choose any service provider as long as the public treasury finances the services (Le Grand, 2007).

In our research, we examined six web-based user guides intended to support choice in healthcare, education, and pensions, three of which are publicly owned and the other three privately owned. The public guides were the major official guides to the markets, as

recommended by the authorities. The private guides were popular options, with a large number of visitors at the time of our field research.

We followed four steps in our data collection and analysis. First, we conducted 16 semi-structured interviews. The interviewees (project leaders and designers) had extensive knowledge of the past, current, and future activities of their agencies and a good understanding of web-based support for choice. We conducted the first round of interviews between December 2012 and May 2014, and the second between September and November 2015. All interviews, which lasted between 30 and 70 minutes each, were audio-recorded and transcribed. We asked the interviewees to describe the general background of their guides and their basic features, in relation to our distinction between choice guides and judgment guides. Second, we interpreted some providers' policy documents. Third, we examined the design and content of the guides. And fourth, we compared and summarized the six guides. We focused on the use of choice guides versus judgment guides and on the contributions to technology design in public service choice.

In his often-cited publication on 'material markets', MacKenzie (2009) claimed that the best-suited method for studying technology uses is to observe how the technology is used 'in action'. We decided on the complementary approach, which is actually less frequently applied; it is used to study the technical and political intentions behind the guides, employing the methodology of interviews with designers in order to examine their policy documents. This methodological choice corresponded with our intention – to describe the potential agency or capacity in the guides. We are fully aware that actual use often follows unintended courses, but that is a task for another study.

Three markets and six guides

Three markets

The market for healthcare services

Even though there are some general choice options for healthcare in Sweden, the main efforts to introduce choice have taken place in the area of primary (that is, outpatient) care. Since 2010, Swedish primary care is organized according to a market model whereby citizens have a free choice of care center, and the money follows the citizen. This model is not used in other sectors of healthcare, though there is a certain degree of freedom of choice regarding

those other services. In Sweden (and incidentally in Finland), primary care is mainly organized in primary care centers (Chauvette, 2003) and is not based on a system of general practitioners, as it is in many other European countries.

The market for primary and secondary schools

Markets for primary schools were introduced in Sweden in 1992, and for secondary schools in 1994. The question of choice was new in relation to primary schools, in contrast to secondary schools, where user choice has been allowed for decades. Choice of secondary schools is also supported by a system of person-to-person counseling. When markets were introduced, the information that users required before they could choose became a hot topic, and web-based guides were introduced in the late 1990s.

The market for premium pension investment funds

It is commonly said that the Swedish pension system is built on three pillars (Sjögren Lindquist and Wadensjö, 2011): *earning-related insurance,* with a nationally defined contribution and a mandatory funded personal pension component – premium pension; *occupational pensions* negotiated by employers and trade unions; and *different forms of personal pension plans* such as traditional insurance and individual pension savings in a bank. In this section of the chapter, we concentrate on the premium pension – a national mandatory earnings-related insurance, in which 2.5% of the salary of people working in Sweden is deposited. The premium pension is the result of the 1994 pension reform, when the idea of individual choice was introduced. The premium-pension scheme comprises approximately 800 investment funds from which the citizens are expected to choose in order to maximize their own pension capital. Guides are developed by both public and private actors to support citizen choice.

Six guides

Government-owned guides

A public guide to healthcare

The major public website in Sweden is the Healthcare Guide (1177.se, Figure 8.1). A designer explained the intentions behind the guide: 'It is a source of knowledge […] we want to empower the patient or

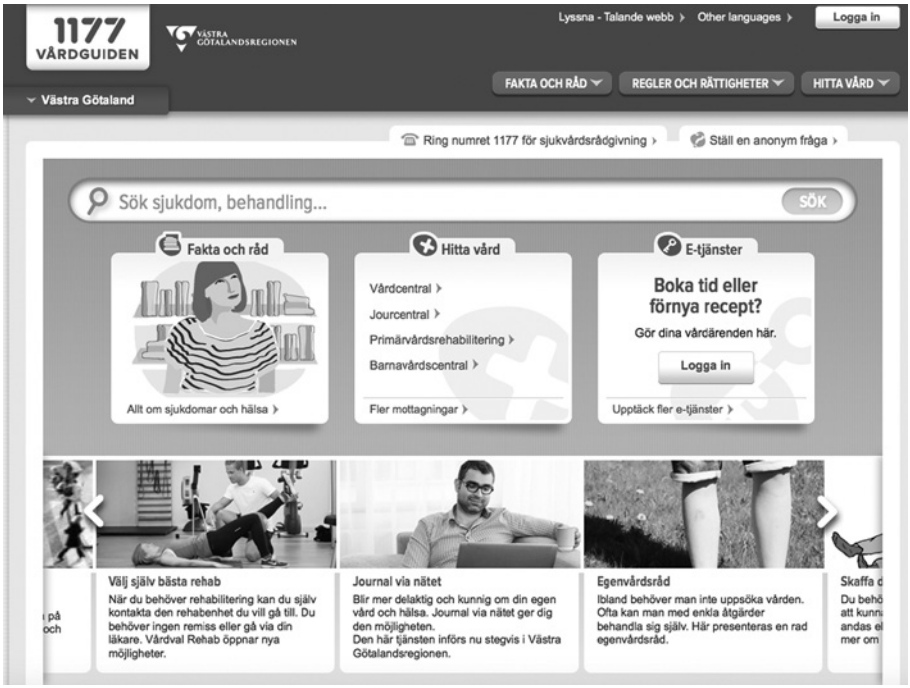

Figure 8.1 Healthcare Guide (*Vårdguiden* 1177)

the citizen regarding their ability to make their own decisions – to become a co-producer and to cooperate in the treatment program' (Designer, 13 November 2013, translations by the authors).

The website has three major entrances: 'Facts and advice' (*Fakta och råd*), 'Find care' (*Hitta vård*), and 'E-services' (*E-tjänster*). 'Facts and advice' contains descriptions of a large range of diseases and the appropriate treatment programs. 'Find care' focuses on primary care, even though there are some examples of special care. The user can select a limited number of care centers and compare them on the computer screen on the basis of a number of quality indicators, such as patient satisfaction and waiting times. 'Find care' can be seen as an example of a web-based guide.

Yet, the fact that healthcare guides allowed the user to choose a limited number of provider units that could be compared should not be interpreted as meaning that designers encouraged ranking. As a designer of the private Primary Care Center Guide said when asked about ranking based on quality indicators related to healthcare:

'We have avoided the whole discussion about ranking because it is a toxic question in healthcare, except for issues regarding patients' experiences' (Designer, 15 April 2013). The only ranking that is supported in public healthcare guides is based on patients' experiences and opinions generated, for example, in the National Patient Survey (2015). Some of the comparisons among care centers in the Healthcare Guide also provide information about certain treatment programs regarding diabetes. These comparisons are of a yes-or-no character, however: the center either has or does not have such programs. It says nothing about the quality of the programs.

A public guide to education

The Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket.se) is the official website for Swedish primary and secondary schools. The website offers descriptions of the school system, along with sources of statistics on the school system and on schools: protocols from school inspectors who conduct peer reviews of schools on a regular basis, for example. A designer from the Swedish National Agency for Education formulated the aims of that website in the following manner:

> Parents and pupils should be able to choose a school – the guide makes it easier for them to compare schools – the guide supports choice. It's all about our having a school market in Sweden, and we want to contribute information, but it is also about our providing information about the school system, so that it's available to all citizens. (Designer, 25 September 2015)

The Choose Your School guide belongs to the Swedish National Agency for Education, but it is a separate web-based guide with its own address. It contains a database covering primary and secondary schools in Sweden and a selection procedure:

> The first step is the choice of the type of school (first or secondary school) and the ownership of schools (private or public).
>
> The second step in the procedure is to determine a specific geographical location (e.g., a municipality) from which schools can be identified.
>
> The third step is to identify factors that the pupil and parent consider important. There are such factors as distance, but also a number of quality indicators – such as the student–teacher ratio and the grades of pupils – which add information about each school.
>
> Finally, a limited number of selected schools can be compared on the computer screen based on such indicators, but the guide doesn't support rankings.

A designer at the Swedish National Agency for Education explained it:

> [W]hen we meet our target group (pupils and parents), we sometimes get the impression that they want us to make the decision for them: please tell me which school is best. They really want to select a number of variables and then push the search button, and something happens and they get a ranking list. But it is not realistic. It is you who must think about the options before making a certain choice, and we can offer certain jigsaw puzzle pieces along the way. (Designer, 25 September 2015)

A public guide to the premium investment-fund market

The Premium Pension Investment Fund Guide belongs to the Swedish Pension Agency; it offers support for the choice of various equity and bond investment funds. The public central website – owned by the Swedish Pension Agency (www.pensionsmyndigheten.se) – contains information concerning the Swedish pension system. As a representative of the authority explained: 'A distinct part of the mission that the Swedish Pension Agency received from the government is to inform about the whole pension system […] and how I can manage my own pension' (Designer, 25 October 2015).

The Premium Pension Investment Fund Guide contains a five-step procedure:

1. *Welcome.* At this stage the user is welcomed and receives information about the premium pension and the opportunity to choose from among approximately 800 investment funds.

2. *Choose risk level.* Here the user obtains information about risk and receives support in choosing an appropriate risk level. The risk is expected to be balanced among various stock markets (e.g., North America, Europe, and emerging markets).

3. *Choose investment fund.* At this step, the user receives information about the importance of the level of the fee charged by the respective investment fund and receives further support in choosing an appropriate level. The fee construction varies, but it is usually described as a certain percentage of the value of the fund over the year.

In Steps 4 and 5, users can receive support in creating a personal portfolio of funds. It is pointed out, however, that the guide is not allowed to provide recommendations. The message is that the user must learn about risk and about the role of fees before choosing funds. Nevertheless, there is also a default option with a moderate risk and a low fee – for users who refuse to choose.

Private competitors

A private guide to healthcare

Although it offers little in the way of provider ranking in healthcare, the Primary Healthcare Guide is an interesting example of an algorithm for matching user with care center. The algorithm was based on the user's answers to five questions regarding required proximity, valuation of the three dimensions of closeness, satisfaction with waiting times, and requirements for public versus private ownership. The algorithm automatically summarized the user's answers and matched the sum with a database of available care centers. The result presented by the algorithm was an ordered list, with the 'best' care center at the top.

A designer described the Primary Care Center Guide in this way: 'This is the fastest case we offer. You should not have to choose. We have three dimensions by which we can rank an option for you, dependent upon your preferences' (Designer, 15 April 2013).

A private guide to education

There are also privately owned guides in the market for education, and one of the best-known ones in Sweden is All Studies. All Studies covers education options at all levels in Sweden and, to some extent, even education abroad. This information about education possibilities attracts the most users. Another option that appeals to many users is the Job and Salary service, at which the user can obtain information about the salary which a certain type of education can be expected to generate. The guide also offers person-to-person counseling. There is no possibility of comparing schools based on quality indicators or ranking results. As to the purpose of this guide, a designer said:

> We provide information about gardening courses, but also options. What if the student finds out that there are too many candidates for gardeners in the coming 10 years, and there will be no jobs? We give information that allows students to consider other options. (Designer, 17 September, 2015)

In such varied ways, the guide supports the user in connecting education with working life.

A private guide to premium pension investment funds

The Premium Pension Investment Fund Guide is owned by the government, but there are also privately owned guides, one of which is Joint Funds. As one of the founders of the guide told us:

> There are many pension advisors in this market for investment funds. There is an apparent risk of conflict of interest between the user and

Figure 8.2 Joint Funds (*Kollektiva fondval*)

> the advisor. On the one hand, the advisor gets royalties from proposing a certain investment fund, while on the other hand the user is interested in the fund that gives the best return. (Designer, 29 September 2015)

Joint Funds offered a solution: to collect statistics of users' choices and their performance in the market. They identified the funds that the most successful users had chosen and proposed a portfolio of these investment funds to other users who had decided to follow Joint Funds (Figure 8.2).

The procedure of choice behind Joint Funds is as follows. First, the guide regularly identifies the most successful users who have used the guide and lists their choices among approximately 800 funds. Based on that information, and using a portfolio theory model, the guide establishes a basket containing the most successful investment funds chosen by previous users. The recommended portfolio of investment funds depends on age interval (20–30, 30–40, and so on; older generations are expected to decrease their risk). Information about an updated portfolio of funds is regularly sent to the users of Joint Funds via text messages, and they are invited to visit the website and change their existing portfolio of investment

funds to the newly proposed one. The creator of the guide pointed out to us that they do not work with recommendations; they merely identify the most successful users and suggest that other users of Joint Funds follow their choices. At the end of the interview with the creator of the guide, the interviewer asked, 'So, this is an almost mechanical procedure?' And the interviewee answered: 'Totally mechanical' (Creator, 29 September 2015).

Comparing guides

All the designers we interviewed admitted that users had problems choosing between various options and argued that information was the key for dealing with an overflow of choices. Different designers had different ideas about ways in which they could and should support the users. One option was to motivate and encourage the user to make an informed choice; the other was to mechanize the entire choice procedure in order to avoid choice. In the following pages, we begin by discussing some common characteristics of guides, and then, based on our theoretical frame of reference (judgment guides versus choice guides), identify some differences.

Common characteristics

The identification and demarcation of provider units is a major element of all guides. In the three markets we have studied, these units were schools, primary care centers, and investment funds. It is not always easy to identify units, however, because there are often education programs other than those offered by schools, general practitioners (rather than primary care centers), and different types of investment fund (e.g., equity and bond) rather than separate funds. The designers first had to decide what a unit was, and then separate each unit from the others in the market. All publicly financed schools, all publicly financed care centers, and more than 800 approved investment funds were identified as units and located in separate markets by the designers.

Designers realized that most users were not interested in all units in these markets and wanted to give users the opportunity to compile a limited number of units to choose from. One way to accomplish that was to include a geographical location in the guide on the basis of which the user could identify relevant units, such as schools and healthcare centers in the vicinity. In the investment-fund market, the type of fund was used as a way of selecting a limited number

of funds among more than 800 available options. One example is a geographical dimension that allows the user to select a limited number of global, European, Latin American, or Swedish investment funds. In summary, the guides wanted to give the user the opportunity to fill the computer screen with a limited number of separate units for comparison.

It was not enough for designers to enable the user to limit the number of separate units. They also added various types of quality indicators to the units that users had selected. All designers tried to use available sources of information and to connect that information to the units. Whether the unit was publicly or privately owned constituted one type of general information. Most designers also attempted to add user experiences to the units. In schools, it was data about pupils' and parents' experiences, often based on surveys. In healthcare, it was information about patient satisfaction as expressed in a survey (National Patient Survey, 2015); and in the case of the Premium Pension, it could be information about earlier user choices. Finally, some designers also added peer-review evaluations of units.

Judgment guides

We have identified three public websites (skolverket.se, 1177.se, and pensionsmyndigheten.se) that provide general information about schools, healthcare, and pensions, respectively. A major purpose of these websites seems to be a contribution to user knowledge before the making of a choice. The point of departure for the designers was that user choices in education, healthcare, and pensions are complex and cannot be reduced to one or a few personal preferences. These websites were also designed to connect the user to larger political objectives. In education, designers referred to life-long learning. In healthcare, they referred to the user's responsibility for his or her good health and for active participation in ongoing treatment programs. In pension-related guides, designers referred to the user's responsibility for future pension levels. These references to government objectives can be seen as a way for designers to motivate the user to make a choice. These guides promote the identity of the user as a citizen rather than a consumer, on the assumption that a motivated citizen can be expected to assume responsibility for the realization of government objectives.

The designers relied heavily on neo-liberal goals of individual freedom and responsibility (Gobby, 2017), and they wanted to

motivate the users to make a choice based on the information presented in the guide. Thus, to some extent, the designers relied on the motivated user's ability to collect information that could support a choice, but they also wanted to enable the users. To achieve this goal, they made various sources available to users: statistics from professional networks conducting evaluations of care units; primary school inspections by government institutions; and calculations such as the Sharpe ratio (risk in relation to earnings) developed by Nobel laureate William Sharpe, in relation to investment bonds. The designers' configuration of users was relatively loose, and the guides constrained their users in a limited way. The users were put at the center of an action net that was to result in a choice. Thus, increased knowledge and a long-term view were ways intended to motivate and enable the user and reduce the problem of an overflow of choices. In our interpretation, designers worked with the intention of creating a *judgment device* (Karpik, 2010) that would support the capacity of users to conduct more complex evaluations of existing units and their services.

Designers of these key public websites also tried to create dedicated guides that aided users in defining and comparing units on the basis of a limited number of quality indicators. The public guides Choose Your School, Healthcare Guide, and the Premium Pension Investment Fund Guide offer procedures supporting user choices. These guides help the user to pick out the number of units to be compared, and they offer tools that can be employed by users about to make a choice. These guides can be seen as examples of judgment guides, because they offer an open procedure to be followed by the user while making a choice; but they also add some restrictions. As we have said before, it is the user who is in the center of the action net, and the guide merely suggests a limited number of quality indicators to be employed by the user. The configuration of the user is still rather loose, and there are a number of other quality indicators available – to be utilized by the user or not. It is often recommended that users conduct their own research outside the guide before making a choice. Most public guides of this type were also connected to person-to-person counseling systems with a long tradition in the Swedish public sector, although private guides could offer counseling as well. In the All Studies guide, for example, students were offered the opportunity to contact counselors by telephone before choosing a secondary school. Here the users could add more information to their choice than was available in the more uniformly designed guides.

It must be stressed that the designers of public guides were not allowed, or did not find it appropriate, to give advice to users regarding which option to choose, and they tried to avoid doing so. The most obvious example is the Premium Pension Investment Fund Guide. It was not possible for its designers to build a guide that produced a ranking list that would suggest a specific fund to be chosen, because that would give the user the right to claim damages against the government if the investment fund decreased in value and the suggestion turned out to be a bad one. Ranking also goes against the idea that users must take responsibility for their choices in neo-liberal policies which involve the citizens' relationship to the state.

In summary, judgment guides seek to reduce the overflow of choices by motivating and enabling the user. The user, as a citizen, is expected to assume responsibility for choosing a unit from a long-term perspective.

Choice guides

There were also a number of guides in which designers tried to formalize the user's procedure when making a choice. Examples include the private All Studies, Primary Care Center Guide, and Joint Funds guides (Figure 8.2). Because of the formalized character of choice in these guides, we labeled them 'choice guides'. Their designers attempted to translate a rational choice model into these formalized procedures.

The designers of these guides were not against ranking, which opened up the opportunity to formalize choice procedures. The All Studies guide provides a procedure that compares user preference for a maximum life income with statistics of incomes that various educational programs have generated historically. Using that procedure, the user can obtain a ranking list of educational programs that have been the most profitable historically, which will suggest the optimal choice. A designer can proceed one step further in the construction of a formalized procedure, as illustrated by the private Primary Care Center Guide. There, the designer connected three types of criteria: geographical closeness, user opinions, and type of ownership (public or private). The user had to answer five questions regarding the value of the criteria before choosing a care center. Thus the user-preferences profile was automatically compared with available care centers in the area, resulting in a ranking list with the best provider at the top. As for the premium pension context,

a visitor to the Joint Funds guide (Figure 8.2) was recommended to follow the historically most successful members. The choice procedure was mechanized.

As the procedures used by designers were strictly formalized, we see them as algorithms. The designer assumed that the profile of the user could be a point of departure for a rational choice of care center according to an algorithm. The designer completes a configuration of the user by using advanced restrictions, and the user is not allowed to go outside these restrictions. In our opinion, it is the algorithm rather than the user that is located at the center of the action net in these guides. The user merely has the limited task of defining the value of a few predefined preferences, and the algorithm then makes the decision.

The algorithms used in the guides we described are not very advanced, and it is still possible for the user to understand the quality indicators that are used and, to some extent, how relationships between indicators are calculated. The question is, 'What happens if some of the quality parameters become more complex, and relations between them are hidden in a more complicated algorithm?' All designers in this study reported that adding qualities to a unit was a complicated and sometimes controversial job. One example is the medical performance of care centers: it was difficult to find measures of medical performance to be added to an evaluation of performance. Available data about performance were primarily intended for professionals, and they did not always agree. Consequently, this type of performance data was not (yet) included in the Primary Care Center Guide. In the future, however, more data of this kind may be included in the algorithms, and that may make it difficult for a user to comprehend the disputed medical quality of the units. More qualities can also be added to an algorithm, as happened in the dating industry described by Roscoe and Chillas (2013). In that industry, algorithms might be hidden, at least to some extent, and regarded as business secrets. If such guides and algorithms are used in the public sector, private guides with a hidden agenda will mediate the relationship between the state and the citizen.

The design of choice guides comes close to a rational choice model (Callon and Muniesa, 2005), but it still seems to have some limitations. One such limitation is the restricted user rationality (Gobby, 2017). The guide designer predefined the preferences of the user and the algorithm. The user cannot add personal preferences other than those predefined; the algorithm hence includes some things and excludes others. If the user accepts the predefined preferences,

however, the guide can spot 'the best option' without delay. Such guides can be useful if the user wants to find the 'best' primary care center or quickly contact a provider. It seems that choice guides tend to configure the user strictly as a consumer – not as a citizen. Yet from the government's point of view, choice guides can efficiently match the available provision of services with the user's (predefined) preferences on a large scale. Choice guides can be seen as an example of users having the ability to make a choice in the market if they have the appropriate support (Le Grand, 2007).

The idea of choice guides also has some connections to traditional organization theory and theories of decision-making. Cyert and March (1963) suggested that decisions are often avoided in organizations and compensated by standard operating procedures. The algorithms presented in this chapter can be seen as examples of standard operating procedures. Furthermore, user decisions supported by judgment guides have been described in organization-theory research. Simon (1947) proposed the concept of *bounded rationality*, which means that users try to find a 'satisficing' rather than an optional decision.

In summary, choice guides seek to reduce the overflow of choices by stabilizing the action net and the choice procedure via an algorithm. One could ask, therefore, if it is the algorithm or the user who makes the final choice. In any case, the guide and the algorithm in itself are key contributors to the final choice made on the basis of a choice guide.

Conclusions

The guides in the three welfare service markets addressed in this chapter were supposed to deal with the issue of an overflow of potential choices, as summarized in the concepts 'paradox of choice' (Schwartz, 2004) and 'tyranny of choice' (Salecl, 2010). They did that in either of two ways, their designers configuring two types of users: a motivated and enabled citizen and a consumer represented by an algorithm.

The first type of guide is tied to the major public authorities in the three markets. A main objective behind these guides is to motivate and enable the user to make an informed choice. The designers of these guides want to put the user at the center of an action net of choices. The guide enables the user by providing such information as peer reviews, user opinions, and general relevant information that can be easily sought and found. The purpose of most guides

is to counsel and support users' knowledge creation. Therefore, the guides can be seen as connected to a long tradition of human guidance and counseling that is an important aspect of the Swedish welfare model. The guides also connect the users to more contemporary political goals, such as users' life-long responsibility for their own health, education, and pensions. We regard this type of guide as judgment guides (Karpik, 2010). Users are given the opportunity to create their own action net which can help them to find a 'satisficing' option – in contrast to the optimal one.

A second type of guide is mainly tied to private actors, but some aspects can be found in public guides as well. These guides invite the user to an automatized action net, in which an algorithm is at the center. A major idea behind this guide is that the user should not have to choose; it is the algorithm that makes the choice. The designers select a number of factors, such as proximity to the unit, user opinions and performance, and salaries related to education. The user is invited to use this formalized action net in order to identify the best option. Such action nets are used by designers to connect a user with a unit by means of more or less simple propositions about user preferences. Among these designers, automatization of the choice procedure is regarded as a solution to the paradox of choice. Even so, the creation of choice guides is also subject to major restrictions. Because the publicly owned guides are not allowed to make recommendations, the designers of these guides hesitate to produce ranking lists. Privately owned guides have greater freedom. We agree with Callon and Muniesa (2005) that the goal of this type of guide choice is to map a rational choice model. (The purpose is to produce a ranking list and the best option, given the factors that are built into the action net.)

We concluded that a number of relatively dissimilar guides are being developed in each market, confirming Karpik's (2010) prediction that the future will see an increasing competition among guides which has the potential of being more important than the competition between provider units. Users would be able to choose a guide that suits their preferences regarding, for example, the degree of formalization of the choice procedure. Another dimension which may turn out to be essential in a competition among guides may be the attractiveness of these guides to users. While this is a key issue for all guides, it may be most important for private ones, whose goal is to attract investors and commercials.

This is a report from a study of the designers of web-based guides, but studies of the ways in which users actually use available

guides are required. Could it be that users combine guides, for example, and therefore act as both consumers and citizens?

Field material

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National Patient Survey (2015) Nationell Patientenkät, Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting, http://npe.skl.se, accessed 2017–06–02.

Sjögren Lindquist, Gabriella, and Eskil Wadensjö (2011). Sweden: a viable public-private pension system 1. In: Ebbinghaus, Bernhard (ed.), *The varieties of pension governance: Pension privatization in Europe*. Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, May, http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199586028.001.0001/acprof-9780199586028, accessed 2017–06–02.

9
Virtual red tape, or digital v. paper bureaucracy

Barbara Czarniawska

> Our everyday Camusian-existential struggle […] is played 'as if' it were unfolding within a labyrinth-like bureaucracy, as we wrestle with the increasing complexity of contemporary life, with its spider's web of rules and regulations, some often contradicting the others. (Warner, 2007: 1028)

Framing technology has changed: what about overflows?

Before I move to the main topic of my chapter, 'virtual red tape' as a new way of framing bureaucratic overflows, a few words about bureaucracy. Max Weber's (1922/1956) definition of bureaucracy as a system of administration conducted by trained professionals according to fixed rules is generally accepted; he saw it as 'a short-term good but a long-term evil' (Brown, 1978). Weber believed that bureaucracy would solve many specific societal problems, but that it would eventually contribute to the bureaucratization of whole societies, replacing affective human relations. Since then, there have been many defenders and attackers of bureaucracy, all of whom used the definition that suited their purposes.

In broad terms, I agree with Paul du Guy's general thesis, as formulated in *In praise of bureaucracy* (2000): bureaucracy can be praised for many reasons, not least for its *ethos*. Bureaucratic efficiency was to guarantee the delivery of public services according to principles of impersonality, equality, and fairness (du Gay, 1994). So I am assuming, in agreement with du Gay, that bureaucracy does serve to achieve its moral goals,[1] and am concentrating only on

1 Cordella (2007) claims, however, that e-government fails precisely at enforcing and guaranteeing the fulfillment of democratic values.

what is criticized as falling short of the original promise: its 'instrumental rationality'. How instrumental and how rational is bureaucracy in the digital era? The Gore Report (1993: 114) promised that the 'electronic government will be fairer, more secure, more responsive to the customer, and more efficient than our present, paper based systems'. The overflow of forms to complete, containing unintelligible questions demanding a multiplicity of information, was one of the problems with those systems – problems for administrators and citizens alike. In analyzing red tape in US administration, Kaufman (1977/2015: 3) reported that in 1973 one governmental agency issued 'enough documents to make a stack seventeen feet [5 m] high'. 'Cutting red tape' was one of the four principles suggested in the Gore Report. Has it happened?

Perhaps not, but digitalization did happen. As to other effects, especially concerning costs, opinions are divided (see, e.g., Clark, 2013). But there is no doubt that the machine metaphor is no longer a metaphor, but a correct description of a large part of bureaucracy in most countries. This is not a surprising development, but a realization of an ideal of 'automatic government' (Howard, 2015: xi). The red tape was not cut, but replaced by a virtual one. The framing device has been modernized, as Kaufman predicted 40 years ago:

> Even a fully wired and automated society would not be rid of red tape, though. Safeguards against abuses would be extensive. Methods of appeal from errors or abuses would have to be developed. Most of all, the machines themselves would impose an unyielding set of obligations and prohibitions on their users. (Kaufman, 1977/2015: 84)

But how does digital bureaucracy compare to paper bureaucracy in terms of its 'instrumental rationality', efficiency, and effectiveness, as judged by both the users and the officials? More specifically, how well does the digital bureaucracy fulfill the function of a framing device? After all, one of the main reasons for digitalizing public sector services was the information overload caused by the increased complexity of administrative processes (Cordella, 2007). A brief look at the history of the English expression 'red tape', which is used as a metonym for bureaucratic overflow, may be helpful in answering these questions.

A short history of red tape

The Spanish administration of Charles V, King of Spain and Holy Roman Emperor (1500–1558), started to use red tape to bind critical

administrative dossiers requiring immediate discussion by the Council of State, in order to differentiate them from ordinary documents, which were bound with simple string (Dickson, 2015). Red tape was obviously a frame that was expected to tame the overflow: there were too many documents, and marking key documents with red tape helped to establish priority. The intention was to make the administration of the vast empire more efficient.

It was not long before the British Empire imitated the idea,[2] and by the end of the American Civil War, the practice had spread across the Western world. When Civil War veterans looked for their military records, they found them bound in a red ribbon (McAlpine, 2012). But long before that, the term acquired the opposite meaning: that of rigid conformity to formal rules that hinders or prevents action. As Charles Dickens (1849) wrote in *David Copperfield:* 'Britannia, that unfortunate female, is always before me, like a trussed fowl: skewered through and through with office-pens, and bound hand and foot with red tape.' The negative meaning was often used in relations to the British administration in India, in particular, giving rise to a new term: 'red tapism'. Indeed, as Robert Darnton (2001: 3) put it, 'The Indian Civil Service, recruited since 1853 by means of competitive examination, produced reports on everything under the subcontinental sun.' The unfavorable connotations of red tape persist, and not only in India; but it is in present-day India that anthropologist Akhil Gupta (2012) describes it so vividly:

> From the standpoint of the bureaucrat, one of the virtues of the form as a genre of writing is that it can be easily stored, compiled and organized. Here, one needs to pay attention to the technologies of search and retrieval. In the Indian bureaucracy, the key device for the storing and retrieval of information is the file. The file is the critical unit that organizes bureaucratic life. […] The importance of the file was impressed upon me by an officer who said: 'If it is not in the file, it does not exist'. […]
>
> The file is a compilation of papers of different sizes and qualities; of annotations often made on original documents by officials; and of copied of outgoing correspondence. These are bound together by two pieces of string, which go through each page, and the cover of the file. Across the width of the file goes a red tape that keeps anything from falling out. (Gupta, 2012: 145–146)

2 Though Bozeman and Feeney (2011) claim that it was Cardinal Wolsey's administrators in the time of Henry VIII (1491–1547) who started tying scrolls containing government edicts with red tape.

But the technologies of search and retrieval have changed dramatically since then. The 'file' is now a 'folder', and the folder may contain a great many files which do not need a red tape to keep them together. It may be said that virtual red tape has replaced red tape. In general, replacing paper forms with digital forms and requiring people to complete and submit them without the intervention of a human bureaucrat was supposed to be next, and a dramatic step toward the increased efficiency of bureaucracy. There is still an overflow of documents, but the technologies of managing them have advanced accordingly.

Is that so? As this question is not easy to answer via a properly designed field study, I chose to collect various self-observations of the phenomenon as my field material. In what follows, I present a set of stories, told by my colleagues and me, illustrating the actual functioning of 'virtual red tape'.[3] The overflows in digital bureaucracy may be larger in the USA than in other countries, but they are found everywhere and are not limited to the public sector.

A visa to Australia

This is my story:

> X University in Australia has invited me to spend two weeks as a Visiting Professor. I have previously been at three Australian universities, two in the same town, in a similar role. I usually gave a public lecture or a keynote at a conference, held a seminar for faculty, and advised doctoral students. All these activities fit precisely into the description of requirements for an eVisitor visa, which I had.
>
> This is exactly what I was supposed to be doing at XU. Yet an administrator – who invoked the authority of the immigration consultant – has informed me that I need to apply for a Temporary Working Visa. I presented my arguments, with quotes from the immigration website and my invitation letter, claiming that an eVisitor visa is enough. The administrator repeated the same statement several times, adding that, if in doubt, I could ask someone at the Australian Embassy in Sweden for advice. I repeated that the immigration site suggests that the closest embassy (where I can possibly be called for an interview) is in Berlin. The administrator sent me the Berlin

3 It should be added that all the narratives that follow come from people with university education – people who should be used to digital operations. Marie-Anne Dujarier (2008/2016) quoted much more dramatic experiences of retired people from the countryside trying to orient themselves in the digital jungle of Paris airport.

embassy's telephone number. Assuming that she was joking, I thanked her with a smiley face. All in all, in six days (including a weekend) she sent me six e-mails, and I have sent her eight. I was also sent the formal invitation letter, together with information about my visa a week later.

Having understood that nothing could be done, I went to the immigration website and started my visa application, as instructed by the immigration consultant. I logged onto my account (which existed from previous applications for eVisitor; this was going to be my fifth visit to Australia) and soon received information that the site would be closed for updating in a week – exactly on what I believed to be my deadline date. After 10 minutes, the website closed down, and I was instructed to return later. I did, and, interrupted by closedowns every 10 minutes, I arrived at page 6 of 20 of the application. At that time, I was required to provide details about my host, about whom I did not have a clue. I wrote to the administrator. Having received no answer, I wrote directly to my host. She contacted the administrator, who answered four days later. (In defense of the administrator, two of them were the weekend days.) The first answer repeated the same text I had received previously and ignored my specific question. I wrote again, limiting the letter to the specification of the information I needed. I received an answer that, apparently, came from the immigration consultant, although no name was ever given.

I went back to my account. The next page required even more details about my host university, and then the website went down. Totally resigned, I called the Australian Embassy in Stockholm. After the appropriate chain of choosing and pressing buttons, the automated response informed me that the Australian Embassy in Stockholm does not issue visas and does not provide information about visas.

I wrote a panicky letter to the administrator and my host. Awaiting their answers, I opened the XU website, found some of the relevant information, and returned to the immigration website. From then on, I patiently returned to the immigration website every 10 minutes after each closedown. (I eventually learned to save every completed page.) Emboldened by success, I started to omit certain information that I noticed was unnecessary (my host's mobile telephone number, for example and my fax number – we do not use faxes anymore). When some information was necessary, the page would come back with a notice in red.

On the last page, I had to swear to the Australian government that I understood all the questions in the application. I swore, although I am not so sure myself. I also said, truthfully, that the Australian nation would not suffer harm if I do not perform the activities planned. I may have ruined my chance for a visa. Who knows?

One action that did not present any problems was payment. It went smoothly, without the website closing down even for a moment. I have received the receipt and the information that the payment will not be refunded if I do not obtain a visa. Fair enough – the immigration offices need money like everybody else.

After the six-day process came to an end, I was reflecting on the difference between the paper and the digital part of the bureaucracy. Strangely enough, I became extremely angry when the website went down or when I was unable to answer questions, but I was merely amused and/or resigned when my human correspondents did not engage in dialogue with me. Furthermore, the actual time spent on the application (not counting letter-writing) was something like four hours. Recently, I went to the police to renew my passport, where I waited for four hours without impatience. I assumed that it would be a long wait and took a book along with me to read. (The rest of the application was digital as well, including the photo, and I had my new passport five working days later.)

Questions to be explored concern, among other things, the issue of habits versus expectations. Was I so angered by the Australian visa process because I assumed that a digital process would be extremely efficient, and became disappointed when it was not? Or was it because I knew there was no way of engaging in a discussion with the computer? But I would not be able to hold a discussion, in the proper sense of the word, with people either. Is it that I am so used to difficulties with paper bureaucracy, but not in digital bureaucracy, that I was more forgiving in the Swedish passport case than in the Australian visa case? One answer to this question can be constructed with the help of Marie-Anne Dujarier's (2008/2014, 2016) study of 'consumers' work': consumers currently engaged in self-service, collaborative coproduction, and the work of organizing. In self-service especially, 'service' is being separated from 'relationship', which traditionally belonged to the service, just as it belongs to what I call 'paper bureaucracy'. Thus, I can be angry with the computer, because there is nothing I can do against its failures (a feeling of helplessness) and because there are no rules of polite behavior that prevent me from being angry. (Bureaucrats may be tired, or overworked, or forced to do idiotic things by their bosses, so I am more patient and understanding with them.) It seems, however, that self-servicing consumers also require a relationship – people employed to talk to them, with slight or no connection to the job in question. When this servicing person is actually able to help the self-servicing consumer, however, the feeling of gratitude

is overwhelming. And this is exactly what happened to me in my application process for the Australian visa.

A person from the immigration office called me from Australia on my mobile to explain that the kind of visa I was applying for means that I must enter Australia within six months. I applied much too early! She told me that she will now send me a request for additional information, which I need to send within one month, and then she will keep the application on hold until it is six months before my travel. In this way, the intervention of a 'paper' bureaucrat saved me from the labyrinth of computerized bureaucracy. Paradoxically, opening the frame stopped the overflow. And all in all, the turn of events ended up being funny rather than frightening, unlike the fate of the people seeking asylum in Australia, who were detained for years on Manus Island (Warner, 2007).

At the service of the researcher

A further but partial analogy between e-bureaucracy and e-commerce concerns the possibility of 'voice' – that is, feedback. To begin with a difference, digital bureaucracy can afford that which digital commerce cannot: the total prevention of feedback. One of the main Swedish research foundations, the Swedish Research Council, introduced a new digital application system, which unfortunately (given the scandal surrounding PRISM[4]), was called PRISMA. PRISMA can only be properly completed, if at all (there are many technical problems), by young researchers who obtained all their education and spent all their working lives in Sweden. No feedback is allowed. Yet some older researchers could not let it pass, as this letter to PRISMA demonstrates:

> Dear Support,
>
> I have now spent 6 to 8 hours [on getting myself] a decent profile on PRISMA. And I can tell [you] that this is the most user-hostile system that I have ever encountered. I say this as [a] regular user of Science Direct, Academia, Google Scholar Profile, SSRN, LinkedIn, CORDIS and a few other places where I regularly register my publications and whereabouts.

4 PRISM was a clandestine surveillance program under which the United States National Security Agency (NSA) collected Internet communications from at least nine major US Internet companies. PRISMA is an EU program, the designers of which did not know (or did not want to know) about the US PRISM scandal.

> The procedure for importing references seems to follow a random function: a) some of my references in My University Publications came in and others did not; b) chapters were imported as articles with the consequence that book editors become co-authors with no possibility of changing them to their rightful role; c) books became articles. And everything was registered as OA by default when the opposite is the case.
>
> The system's flexibility is zero. Can you tell me, for example, why I must register publications as yy-mm-dd when I register them properly? We out there register publications as yyyy, and that is it.
>
> The quality of the output is zero. I have been sitting for over 10 years on an appointment board where I have read over 1000 applications, and I can say that I am very used to reading CVs and publication lists. But your output makes me unsure about my own publications. So the system cannot be reader-friendly either.
>
> I have also had a huge fight to get PRISMA to accept the fact that I work at two universities. It refused to accept it the first six times. But for some reason, it did on the seventh.
>
> Now my data are in, and I am happy about it. But I really want you to understand that your system is a nightmare for users. And it cost a fortune in time for us to use. After all, it took me nearly a day's work to feed in information that I have ready 24/7 at my fingertips.
>
> I really wonder: who is PRISMA made for? Who is it good for? Does anyone believe that you would stand the test of competition if users were not forced to use PRISMA to apply for FORMAS et al.?
>
> Please, pass these questions to the head of the system, and tell her or him that I am ready to [enter into a] dialogue. You cannot simply keep wasting our time and energy as you do.
>
> Kind regards,
>
> Innocent Victim

The Swedish Research Council has probably excluded the possibility of feedback on the assumption that researchers will know very well what information to enter and how to do so. Another interpretation would suggest that it was a frame introduced in fear of an overflow of critical comments. In e-commerce this cannot be done, so in order to alleviate the difficulty, many sites have another type of frame: a set of questions and answers that rarely if ever concern the actual difficulties. As Dujarier (2008/2014) correctly observed, these would be of possible help only to users who are truly newcomers, but

newcomers will probably not be able to find even those standardized questions. The average competent user will find no help there at all, as both questions and answers are automatized. The frame works, up to a point: experienced users know how to circumvent it, but are probably often too tired to undertake it.

The 'Innocent Victim' of PRISMA has not received any answer. This was in his own country – but researchers do go visiting as well.

A visiting researcher needs a connection

This is a story from a Swedish scholar visiting North America, told in an exchange of e-mails.

From: AB [fictitious name] Faculty Support

Sent: 20 July 2015 2:08 PM

To: UY Computer Help Desk

Cc: CD [home mail address]

Subject: Netlink ID for CD [fictitious name]

Good afternoon,

I approved a Netlink ID request for CD (cc'd above) on Friday, but he hasn't received his Netlink ID yet. Can you send that to him and me as soon as possible?

Thanks so much, A

AB

Faculty Support, Z School of Business

'The world looks different from here'

20 July 2015, 2:46 pm UY Computer Help Desk wrote:

Hi AB & CD,

Netlink IDs are created by clients using a valid V-Number. As C is now an affiliate, their V-Number should be available at 'sponsor' tab. To create a Netlink ID for C please utilize the 'application form' at the tool below:

https:xxxxxxx

Once he's got his Netlink ID, he should be able to see his V-Number. Don't hesitate to respond or give us a phone call if you have any questions or problems.

Regards, K [fictitious name]

Computer Help Desk, University of Y

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From: CD

Sent: 20 July 2015 2:53 PM

To: UY Computer Help Desk

Cc: AB Faculty Support

Subject: Re: Netlink ID for CD

Dear K,

thank you for your response. Am I or is AB expected to fill in the application form?

Kindly,

C

20 July 2015 at 3:03 pm UY Computer Help Desk wrote:

Hi C,

Apologies for the lack of clarity. As the holder of the V-Number, it should be you (J) creating the Netlink ID. The Netlink ID will become your primary identity (along with the V-Number) for all UY services. For example, when the Netlink ID is created, you will also have access to your account and your UY e-mail address

Please let us know if you have any outstanding questions or concerns.

Regards, K

Computer Help Desk University of Y

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From: CD

Sent: 20 July 2015 3:53 PM

To: AB Faculty Support

Subject: Re: Netlink ID for CD

Ok. But this sounds little bit weird. In order to get the Netlink ID, I obviously need a V-Number, which I don't have. So what should I do?

C

20 July 2015 at 3:58 pm Computer Help Desk wrote:

Hi C,

I just spoke with A on the phone and confirmed your V-Number. She indicated that she would pass it on to you when she got a chance.

Please let us know if we can assist with anything else.

Regards, K

Computer Help Desk University of Y.

LIMIT. SECURE. REPORT. For information security and privacy tips, visit www. PLEASE INCLUDE THIS MESSAGE IN YOUR REPLY

20 July 2015 at 3:59 pm AB Faculty Support wrote:

Hi CD,

Thanks for your patience! For some reason your V-Number wasn't showing up on your account after I sent your application through. But luckily the Computer Help Desk has passed it along to me. It is VXXXXXXX, and you will need that number when you fill in the Netlink ID application, which you can find here: https:zzzzz.

If you need any assistance please let me know.

Also, EF and I have added you to the photocopier upstairs. It is NUMBER. Once we have your Netlink ID, I will get you hooked up to the printer as well. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Talk to you soon, A

AB

Faculty Support

'The world looks different from here'

From: CD

Sent: 20 July 2015 4:15 PM

To: AB Faculty Support

Subject: Re: Netlink ID for CD

Dear A,

Thanks for this. I have now registered my Netlink ID so it should be running.

Be well,

C

20 July 2015 at 04:18 pm AB Faculty Support wrote:

Great, thank you C! I'll send a request to Computing to have someone swing by tomorrow to get you set up with the printer upstairs. F is away this week but someone will be covering for him.

Have a great evening, A

AB

Faculty Support,

'The world looks different from here'

From: CD

Sent: 20 July 2015 04:23 PM

To: AB Faculty Support

Re: Netlink ID for CD

Great – thanks!

C

Truly, the world looked quite different from over there. Yet this short story does not seem to be very dramatic. It could be interpreted as an example of misunderstandings caused by conversations in English that include non-English speakers (see Wierzbicka, 2013), or a small glitch in digital bureaucracy, resolved in three hours. But it suggests a possibility that will be explored in one of the later examples – that even personal signatures may have been produced by digital avatars, and that the actual people may not even know what is being sent in their name. Potentials for an exponential growth of overflow seem to be waiting around the corner. This story also confirms one of the main theses of this chapter: Digital glitches require paper interventions – whether they are interpreted as opening a frame or simply returning to an earlier one that is not as tight. This thesis is put to the test in the next self-observation.

Maternity leave in Denmark

This time one snail-mail letter describes the whole story in one go:

> To Whom it May Concern
>
> I am writing to complain about your decision not to pay me maternity leave financial support from June 5th 2014.
>
> I contacted you at the beginning of June (I cannot remember the exact date), saying that the six months in which my employer paid me the salary had passed and thus asking what I need to do. You said that I did not need to do anything, but that it would be my employer that would contact you and you would pay me the support. You also said that it could take quite a long time and thus I could not get the money in June, but later.
>
> Thus I waited.
>
> I waited.
>
> I waited.
>
> I waited until September, and then I called you several times. Finally you told me that you were missing the birth certificate of my daughter, who was born in Sweden. So, I sent you the birth certificate. You told me that it was the only thing you needed and then you could pay me.
>
> After a couple of weeks, I called again to ask if you had received the birth certificate and at that point you said that you needed a letter with my signature. This was apparently required in a letter that you had sent me earlier. I had not received anything of that sort from you. So, I asked you to send me the letter to sign and I would send it back to you. At that point you did NOT AT ALL mention any deadline for this. I then received the letter, signed it and sent it back to you. You say that you have received this letter on November 25th and that it was too late.
>
> I called you then on December 12th, 14th, and 16th several times a day. Every time I talked to one of you, I got a different version of the story. First, you told me that you had made the decision not to pay me any leave from June 5th because you had received the letter too late. You also told me that I could complain, but you could not explain to me in English how to do it. It was allegedly written in a paper letter that you had sent me, but it was in Danish and I could not understand what was written on it. Then I called again on Friday December 12th, and you told me that you could write my complaint directly into your system. I agreed that it was a good idea. I also asked you to send me a letter with the complaint and a letter specifying

how much money and for how long I had gotten maternity leave financial support from you. You said that you would do it the same day. I called you again on Monday the 14th to verify that the complaint was written and the letters sent. You told me that there was a complaint in the system but the letters were not sent. So, I asked you again to send me the letters, and we agreed that you would send them both in paper and into an e-box.

I was not familiar with the e-box, but I said I would try to get into the system. I did, and checked the e-box a few hours later, but I did not find anything. I thus called again on the morning of December 16th, asking why I had not received anything. You told me that it was because I had not confirmed having received letters from you, but that as soon as I had done that, it would be there. I did it, but still nothing happened.

So I called again. This time you told me that no letter had been sent to me, neither paper nor digital. You said that paper letters were not being sent because I had an e-mail, and even if I were unable to receive e-mail, you could not have sent me letters on paper. The problem with the digital post, you said, was not your problem, however, but the municipality's problem. You also said that you need one more paper from me: a paper from the Swedish Insurance Office stating how much paternity leave my husband, living in Sweden, had taken.

That was absolute news for me! Nobody had ever mentioned that before. And then you abruptly terminated the phone call without any notice and did not call back.

Apart from the extremely poor client service, the very poor level of English, and the absurd inconsistencies, I would like to point out few things that make the process I have been through outrageously unfair and abusive:

All the written communication – the paper letters – I have received from you has been in Danish. I DO NOT SPEAK DANISH, I am a [EU country] citizen and live in Sweden. This has made it impossible for me to understand what you wrote in those communications. You have been perfectly aware of the fact that I do not speak Danish, as I have tried to talk to you in English every time I have been in contact with you.

You sent me a letter to sign in October 2014. Then you said that the deadline was in July 2014. How could I have signed and returned to you a letter in July if I had received it in October? Moreover, nobody mentioned ANY DEADLINE whatsoever on the phone.

Every time I talked to you on the phone, you added a new document for me to produce. Furthermore, you promised to send letters that I then discovered you had never sent me.

> I thus protest your decision and ask you to revise it as soon as possible. I would also be very grateful if you could communicate with me in English, so that both parties can understand what is being said.
>
> Best regards,

Here, the digital and paper bureaucracies worked hand in hand to mislead the client, who became truly overwhelmed. Language differences probably played a key role, but not necessarily. It could have been yet another contemporary problem, which may be described as 'bureaucracy across the borders' or a conflict of frames: whereas EU countries are supposed to collaborate smoothly on most matters concerning their citizens, this is far from being the case. I have had a similar experience in attempting to claim my Polish pension rights while living in Sweden, but I will spare readers another of my self-observations. Instead I move to another case of digital bureaucracy, concerning pension rights within Italy.

Pension rights in Italy

INPS, Istituto Nazionale per la Previdenza Sociale, Italy's National Institute for Social Insurance, has issued instructions to the citizens, informing them of the obligatory use of 'communication on line *al servizio del cittadino*', the online communication in the service of the citizen (observe the mixture of languages). All applications and questions must be sent to the INPS online only. Here is one citizen's attempt to use the site:

> *October 8, 2013* – I send online a request for supplement/adjustment (I call it 'pension adjustment' in the amount of contributions paid by my ex-employer, but INPS calls it 'supplement'). This concerns the payment of contributions for three years (2010–2013), during which I worked after my formal retirement in December 2009.
>
> *January 20, 2014* – I send online a request for information about the status of my request for supplement/adjustment of my pension because it is almost four months since I have sent it.
>
> *February 3, 2014* – I receive a letter from the INPS with the information about the amount of the supplement I will be given. The monthly payment was increased accordingly the following month.
>
> *April 9, 2015* – I receive an e-mail with a formal response from the INPS to my request from January 20, 2014:
>
> Dear Sir [Why 'Sir'? My first name is Anna, which is feminine in all countries as far as I know],

> Your request has *already* [emphasis mine] been forwarded to the office of relevant competence that is in charge of the request.
>
> Warmest regards, XXX
>
> Thank you for using INPSResponse services, and do not hesitate to contact us with further inquiries. [This is the part that really irritated me most.]
>
> Somehow the INPSResponse services were unable, or didn't bother, to find out that I had already been receiving the adjusted/supplemented pension for almost a year.

A new calculation indeed arrived, only it was completely incomprehensible to Anna, who is an accountant by profession.

> I then discovered, after many searches, that it is possible to contact the INPS in person, so I went there, which started a new episode of my INPS story, which still continues as of October 2016.

This seems to be another example of digital and paper bureaucracies working hand in hand to confuse the client, doubling the overflow. I now move to a simpler matter – that of editing special journal issues.

Lord Algorithm and his rule

I was one of the editors in question, but I asked my co-editor to describe our joint experience of editing a special issue of a Journal We Respect (JWR), with the obligatory help of Manuscript Central (Lord Algorithm, or LA):

> It has already been several hours that we have been poring over the correspondence with more than 20 reviewers. The task seemed simple: to select and contact the potential reviewers for submissions to a special issue that we were editing. This was, after all, the working purpose of our meeting. Two educated people, 'good friends' with new media, familiar with the review procedures on respected publication sites, sitting in front of two laptops and two smartphones, performing the task of guest editors.
>
> The algorithm that supports the process of reviewing, we assumed – guessed – would be a friendly help facilitating our task. After all, the procedure was relatively banal: ask for a peer review via e-mail, with an article attached. We estimated that the most careful selection of reviewers (in accordance with their competence) and sending probably more than 20 e-mails should – including the delays caused by the likely need to update addresses – take us two hours (with one coffee break).

> That things turned out very differently is putting it mildly. The algorithm that was supposed to be friendly and 'intuitive' in use proved to be an obstacle, difficult to overcome. What was to have been an experience in a friendly online correspondence turned out to be frustrating, and lasted more than three months: our adventure with Lord Algorithm (LA).
>
> To begin with, the first batch of dispatched e-mails returned a flurry of requests for postponements. We agreed to them, wondering about such a general need for an extended deadline. It was only a mail sent to us by one of the reviewers much later, outside the LA's control, that made us realize that although we saw a two-month deadline for reviews, the reviewers saw two weeks. LA did not allow us to correct the deadline for reviews. Thus, we wrote a letter to the system administrators (more about that later), and another batch of e-mails to the reviewers with a correction and an apology. While awaiting a correction in the system (we are not sure if it ever took place), we learned to make additions to the automated letters sent by LA. As a result, the correspondence was full of phrases such as:
>
> 'Digital bureaucracy can be very demanding'
>
> 'Please simply ignore the automated letters'
>
> 'If in doubt, please write to us directly'
>
> We had read the paper for 'guest editors' carefully, and several times. Nevertheless, we had to get used to the fact that every time we pressed 'Send', and especially 'Save and Send', we could not be sure what would be the ultimate content of our correspondence. Also, we have been receiving responses to the letters sent by LA, which we have never seen before. We learned, therefore, to send additional, private e-mails, asking reviewers for tolerance and explaining our difficulties in taming LA. What was supposed to be an exchange of two – at the most three – letters (a request, an answer, and if the answer was positive, a letter with the article attached) grew into something like 10–12 letters per reviewer, most of them outside the LA. Luckily, our correspondents seemed to be quite familiar with the absurdity of this and similar situations.

Another fast-growing batch of correspondence constituted attempts to communicate with the system that allegedly controlled LA at JWR. One such letter was:

> Please help. We are receiving letters from authors who are trying to submit and encounter technical errors in Manuscript Central, and from reviewers who are afraid they will be delayed past the wrongly indicated deadline. My co-editor and I have nothing against extending

> the deadline by a week or two, but will also be grateful for the possibility of giving the reviewers the same deadline as, obviously, it is the same pool of competent people who must be involved. Please answer my questions, or forward this and my previous letter to someone who can.

The point was that we were no longer sure that the person signing the letters allegedly from the JWR office was a person. The letters were signed by a real name and surname, and the e-mail address seemed to be a person's. Yet we have always received an automated answer from LA. After months of continuing correspondence, we are still not certain whether our correspondent is a person or an avatar.

We asked the system administrators for help (with a letter outside LA, of course). The answer came a week later, telling us that a proper answer would be sent after the competent person returned from vacation. Indeed, in a week we received an e-mail telling us to … re-read the part of the LA instructions that concerned the correspondence with reviewers.

We ended our efforts on the first day after six hours (coffee taken without breaks). We then worked one day more, after which we separated and continued, keeping in touch digitally. The last answers from the reviewers (real people have their disadvantages, too) arrived together with the first reviews, two months later.

This memorable adventure made us reflect upon options. Snail-mail would probably take the same time; perhaps shorter, because Swedish postal services still work relatively well.[5] For one of us, handwriting could be a pleasant experience (the other can't even read her own handwriting). Making the selection and approaching reviewers via 'private' e-mails would probably take one day, and then another two weeks for people who were on holiday, or whose addresses had changed.

Yet the algorithmic procedure for reviewing and editing (Manuscript Central) has, in the meantime, come to be seen as the guardian of credibility and 'scientificity' of the peer-review process, renowned for its clarity and reliability. It is the result of the joint work of software designers and publishers – a successive phase of the project of digitalizing publishing. Does it work as hoped for?

It needs to be added that at the time JWR had used the algorithm for only a year. Other journals have learned to customize it so that its use need not be so traumatic. So did the editors of JWR, who, as the LA was doing stranger and stranger things (sending letters we didn't write, not sending letters that we did write, putting strange

5 In 2019, this is no longer the case.

new papers in our Guest Editor box), were advising us how to the outsmart him/her/it.

But as Manuscript Centrals are everywhere now, one wonders if their designers meant for them to serve mainly as the neutral controllers of the proper ethos of the authors and editors, or also as aids and facilitators of human time- and effort-consuming tasks. If the latter, it did not work – not yet, at any rate. A fascinating – if dreary – possibility of non-humans as additional producers of overflows emerges.

Virtual red tape: a step forward or keeping up the tradition?

Before readers jump to the conclusion that virtual red tape is always worse than the original variety, or, more precisely, that the digital bureaucracy is worse than the paper one, let me insert a reminder about at least one of many unpleasantnesses related to the latter. Here is a story written by a Polish student as an illustration of the theme 'Power in organizations' (Czarniawska-Joerges and Kranas, 1991:53):

> A weeping woman was sitting in front of the desk, nervously crossing and re-crossing her legs. Behind the desk, which was entirely covered with paper, sat an official talking loudly. It appeared that the woman had an overdue bill for electricity and water which she promised to pay. However, she couldn't pay it immediately because of temporary financial problems. She promised to pay the bill in installments or next month. I thought the solution seemed acceptable, but the official reacted sharply and remarked sarcastically that his [? in original gender unclear, BC] role was collecting dues, not looking for new solutions to people's private problems.

Virtual red tape saves people this kind of humiliation; but when entangled in digital mistakes, it is only humans who can help and repair them. This is ironic, given that there was always discussion about 'human error' in the first studies of 'man–computer interactions'. Nowadays it is politically correct to speak of 'human–computer interaction', and the 'human factor', but human factor still means human error. Of course, in negative cases, the cooperation of digital and paper bureaucracy becomes a true hell for the customer. This is best visible in cases in which the automatic polite phrases ignite visible fury in customers. So, why are we so angry at the digital bureaucracy?

One possible answer is that we – the users or the customers – truly believed that 'virtual red tape' would solve most of the problems

typical of the paper bureaucracy (see, e.g., Keenoy and Seijo, 2009, on hopes about the liberating power of e-mail). The forms would be completed correctly and no matter how many there would be, there would be no overflow, because there is no frame. Search and retrieval would be easy. When faced with a reality that differs from this wish, we feel helpless, powerless, and extremely frustrated. We are given no easy way of unloading our aggression on a human bureaucrat.

Additionally, it is not always easy to fill the templates correctly, yet there is no possibility of crossing the terms and replacing them with tentatively handwritten ones. Digital systems are tenacious: if you must insert 600 characters in the category 'Weaknesses of the proposal', you must insert 600 characters, whether the proposal has any weaknesses or not.[6] There is a frame, and a rigid one.

Does it have to be like that? It must be remembered that the digital administration systems are highly complex, and their complexity increases when they are supposed to function between countries with different systems.[7] Furthermore, the systems are often put to use before they have been properly tested. Indeed, one of the reasons that ObamaCare was not as appreciated as it should have been was the malfunctioning of the enrollment system (HealthCare.gov, the web portal for a federal marketplace that covers 36 states, crashed soon after its October 2013 launch). Furthermore, as in many other attempts to frame a flow, digitalization itself produced an overflow of organizational and technical initiatives, not least in the UK National Health System (Cordella, 2007).

Still, one of the problems is a resilient illusion that virtual bureaucracy saves everybody time and money. Recently, Cornell University severely criticized what it calls 'shadow work': 'administrators who want some information think nothing of sending a survey to hundreds or thousands of professors and giving them a deadline. It takes only a click from a central office, but it's one more task for professors' (Flaherty, 2016). Furthermore, 'arranging travel through […] a travel agent 15 to 20 years ago took a 15-minute phone call. Now it can take the faculty member working on his or her own up to one hour or more […] at a significant cost to the university' (Flaherty, 2016). One does not have to work at Cornell to recognize the phenomenon. In general, a staff member performing a certain

6 I thank Sabina Siebert for this suggestion.
7 I thank Agneta Ranerup for this suggestion.

task often – the digital or the analogue way – will always be more efficient than a faculty member who does it sporadically.

This is not an attempt to plant the seed of doubt into the belief that virtual red tape is potentially an effective way of managing document overflow. Yet that belief can cause cognitive overflow to both the bureaucrats and their customers – after all, the 'manual' management overflow needs to be synchronized with the digital one. One thing is certain: Weber's fears have not materialized, although repeated by Richard Harvey Brown, who related them to the 'paradigm of cybernetics' and claimed that in this paradigm 'the vocabularies of personal agency, ethical accountability, and political community have atrophied' (Brown, 1978: 375). True, the prevailing human emotions are those of irritation and anger, but the sense of humiliation has diminished, and personal agency, ethical accountability, and political community are still relevant.

Another thing is certain: there is no way back. The Swedish government informed its citizens on 16 March 2017 that they want as many as possible to contact the authorities via 'the digital mailbox'. Interestingly enough, the Minister for Civil Affairs, who transmitted this message, also said, 'If a citizen wants to communicate digitally, he or she has a right to do it,' suggesting that digital communication is a new human right. At present about 1 million out of 10 million Swedish citizens are connected to a site called 'My messages' (*Mina meddelanden*), through which they receive e-mails from the authorities (TT, 16 March 2017).

At the other end of the spectrum is a possibility that 'China invents the digital totalitarian state' (*The Economist*, 17 December 2016). Although the stated intentions are to increase transparency and diminish corruption, the envisaged scheme is also going to contain a 'social credit' project, through which citizens will be rewarded for good behavior. Frames will permit no leaks. Up until now, the pilot studies have failed; but the party, along with the central and local governments, continues to prepare the system. Sooner or later, they will succeed.

The future of virtual red tape remains assured, but its functioning as a framing device is somewhat doubtful. Still, it would not be wrong to paraphrase Kaufman's conclusion from 1977 and say that virtual red tape 'may turn out to be at the core of our institutions rather than an excrescence on them' (1977/2015: xxi). Overflow usually wins.

Afterword: a surplus of ideas

Richard Wilk

When do we cross the border between enough and too much? When does a comfortable abundance become an oppressive surfeit? When does choice move from being a privilege to a burden?

This book finishes up a series of three by the same editors which address these questions and more, exploring many aspects of excess, over-abundance, and overflow. These extremes might be the best way to characterize our world, populated by an almost unimaginable 8 billion people, hundreds of millions migrating and seeking refuge, where the obese far outnumber the undernourished and middle-class homes are filled to bursting with goods and possessions. Our consumer marketplace is driven into perpetual motion, as we watch today's valuables turn into tomorrow's trash. Overflow, or perhaps surfeit, is also the best way to describe the wealth of new ideas circulating in these essays.

Trained as an archeologist, I always think about overflow in terms of material stuff; but this book takes us in other directions, into overflows of time, emotions, attention, and activities – describing a proliferation of new categories, whole new branches in cultural taxonomies, and a continuing flow of new things that cannot yet be categorized. But overflowing also means forgetting, cut not in a conscious decision process, but instead in a haphazard undisciplined way that leaves gaps in our memories, people and places that seem familiar but which we cannot name.

Overflow itself is a liquid metaphor that easily accords with the many word choices that social scientists have used to discuss culture, place, and time. In the Boasian anthropology of the early twentieth century, culture appears as a thick liquid like blood, moving from place to place, flowing continuously over time and between

generations, and sticking to tribal people like an invisible tar from which they could not extract themselves. Using terms like diffusion, circulation, transmission, and stagnation gave a scientific edge to what were otherwise mysterious phenomena, as if cultural change was caused by the invisible force of gravity. And while tribal society was like a somnolent dark pool of thick paint, modernity was always ready to add some thinner to get things moving forward.

Outside cultural studies, economists also use hydraulic metaphors which portray the substance of economic transaction, money, utility, or value as a liquid. Exchange becomes a flow which is channeled by markets and regulations, the economy can slow to a trickle under pressure, and of course there are liquid assets that can leak, drain away, or get overheated. Used this way, metaphors can become a conservative influence that restricts and blocks (dams?) creativity and innovation in our thinking (Löfgren and Wilk, 2006). Instead, in this collection the authors show how a metaphor like overflow can also be a creative springboard for understanding and framing new phenomena, connecting otherwise disparate places and processes in new configurations.

One of the key themes woven through this book is the moral value of overflow, which often carries the connotation of error or even terror. Online encyclopedias define overflow this way in reference to the operations of computer programs: 'Overflow condition, a situation that occurs when more information is being transmitted than the hardware can handle', 'Integer overflow, a condition that occurs when an integer calculation produces a result that is greater than what a given register can store or represent'. The implication is simply 'too much', confirmed in a Google image search which turns up mostly water overflowing from a glass or sewage from a pipe. The Old Testament provides a very different interpretation of overflow and over-abundance, from an era when it was considered a very rare blessing or privilege. In Psalm 23, King David (the author) says 'my cup runneth over'; he is testifying to God's generosity to those who love him, or in the Christian interpretation it signifies that 'in Christ we can have overflowing joy, overflowing love, and overflowing peace'.[1] Clearly, it makes a difference what substance is overflowing, for whom, and in what setting, and whether the overflow is expected, rewarding, or threatening.

1 From Got Questions, https://www.gotquestions.org/my-cup-runneth-over.html, accessed 2018–03–28.

Another key theme in this book is the endless variety of social and cultural devices used to keep overflow from happening. Some are physical spaces like train stations and storage lockers, channeling, regulating and managing people and things, sorting them into categories to get them organized and safely emplaced. While consumer capitalism is inevitably a messy and wasteful system, constantly generating outmoded and unwanted goods, jobs that go nowhere and useless skills, there is another less visible system that drains this overflow, manages uncertainty with complex models, screens out the useless from the useful, and simplifies the endless variety of market choices.

As the authors in this collection reveal, the sorting and screening, blocking and chopping of overflow is an inherently political activity with winners and losers. Overflow is therefore always tethered toward choice and decision-making, becoming an indicator of inequality, a subject of judgment and approbation. Today's information ecology depends on an overflow of information and communication, the substance of our social networks and endless hours with our noses pointed to LCD screens. Like the phrenology, passports, photos, and crude biometrics which managed the human overflow of the twentieth century, Big Data is now an instrument of power, 'mined' and manipulated, stolen, bought and sold. These are the new tools for managing the excessive and infinitely intricate complexities of an explosive online culture. And like the earlier tools for managing overflow, they are inevitably imperfect, subject to bias and unable to capture the moment. In this sense, overflow is also the vital currency of our time, the bedrock resource of the information economy.

This book opens the door to a room of hidden machinery, like lifting the back of a pocket watch to see all the complex gears and wheels and springs that drive those two simple hands. From the table of contents, this work might first appear as an overflow of disparate case studies set in places as diverse as a train station, a newspaper office, and the guts of a climate-change model. What could possibly connect them? Overflow turns out to be a multitool for finding hidden and unsuspected connections, unique insights into the workings behind everyday life.

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