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Death Throes of the Publication Industry?

Experiences of a Small Multitude

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Translated by Aileen Derieg

The Published are Presumed Measured or They are Presumptuous. Or: "I am Naught"

What is academic quality? Generations of social scientists agreed that quality in science and research is something relative that can crystallize in an epistemic community, but that this standard is also transient. Measuring academic performance – or rather "academic quality", as it is called – is a phenomenon that has meanwhile been circulating for over fifteen years in the social sciences, also in Austria. The introduction of New Public Management in the universities, in other words new controlling instruments, has also led, slowly but surely, to the introduction of so-called bibliometrics. Indeed, what one writes is meanwhile less read than measured and evaluated. For according to the logic of bibliometrics or scientometrics, every article, every book can be represented in the form of numeric values. Yet this does not apply to the amount of the writing, but instead asserts that the abstract number can make a statement about the quality of what has been written – in

other words, a kind of grade for the published work. When I explain this to my niece, whose school essays are also graded, she thinks it is silly. But unlike the graded school essays that are given numeric values, but are at least read by a teacher, the measurement of academic output (it is better to stop writing quality at this point, because it is highly questionable) is not even based on reading, but rather on citations – in other words on a bare mention, a simple reference to the text.

The most notorious of these purported measurements of quality is the so-called "Impact Factor" of articles published in academic journals. The name suggests that this number can measure the influence – and thus the quality – of a text. The calculation goes like this: if an article is frequently cited, then the number of citations is proof of its quality. This alone is already strange, because the article could be scathingly cited. Yet that is just the most harmless consideration, since at least it presumes that the calculation has a solid foundation. This is not the case, however.

The assertion that quality is or could be measured with the IF is simply false. The IF was introduced by Eugene Garfield, the US-American founder of bibliometrics, with the aim of providing librarians with an indication for the frequency of citation and thus also for the frequency of sales and borrowing. In short: the IF is an instrument intended to measure how well a journal will sell in the future. To this end, it calculates the frequency with which an article in a journal has been cited in another journal (naturally only in a journal represented in an index hand-picked by the bibliometric operator of the measurement).

Within the framework of the quantification madness of new academic controlling instruments, this original intention underwent an odd metamorphosis: the frequency of citations was

now made a quality criterion for the contents of journals or texts. Just as though McDonald's were the best food in the world, simply because of the number of people that buy it.

This all becomes even more absurd if we take a closer look at the numbers: in my field, political science, the highest quality European journals of the SSCI (Social Sciences Citation Index) – an index from Thomson Reuters, also with a private enterprise orientation – have an IF of 2.4. And what does that mean? In the past year, articles from this journal were cited 2.4 times in another journal of the SSCI. Here we need to stop and take a breath: this ridiculousness expressed in a number is actually taken as the criterion for the quality of a publication. Taking this as a seal of approval for a journal or texts published in it borders on a schoolboy's dreams of castles in the air (and it is probably mostly boys who join in this game).

Why is this text also entitled "I am naught"? The IF turns many colleagues into naught – when their commercialized IF is zero. This is exactly what happened recently with many teachers at the Viennese Institute of Political Science in the course of an evaluation of the institute. So the IF is neither harmless nor innocent, no, it causes maximum damage with a minimum of new insights gained – it excludes and, of course, encloses. It suggests quality where it only quantifies. And it disempowers not only authors, but also takes the academic community's capacity for judgment to the point of absurdity. For example: in appointment proceedings, some departments only look at the candidates' IF or H-Index (also a bibliometric measure for the frequency of citations of an author, but one that takes a greater period of time into consideration) instead of reading the texts and statements of the candidates.

If you are going to San Francisco …

The natural sciences, in which the quantification mumbo-jumbo began, are the first that meanwhile criticize bibliometric procedures: in December 2012 a group of natural scientists in San Francisco agreed on the "San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment", which explicitly rejects the fetishization of the Impact Factor. The Declaration not only questions the informative value of the IF and criticizes the manipulability of this purported measure of quality – it also calls upon institutions of financial support and universities to stop using this instrument. The FWF, the Austrian Science Fund, makes a positive reference to this negative stance in a press release as well. Paradox?

So we can put flowers in our hair and instead of being presumed measured, we can be presumptuous.

B.S.

Peer Reviews and Other Economies

Peer Reviews are considered an objective evaluation of academic texts, because these are passed on anonymously to two or three equally anonymous reviewers, who evaluate the texts. In keeping with these reviews, the submitted texts must either be revised by the authors or they are rejected. Two to three rounds of revisions are not unusual, which for international, high-ranking journals, which are generally in English, can sometimes take up to two or three years. A final rejection of the text is possible after every revision and each new Peer Review. In general, it is only from very famous authors that few or no text corrections are required.

The texts must usually follow a standardized format of introduction, state of research, argumentation, and summarizing conclusion, which not only leads to the fact that text arrangements deviating from this format do not enter international academic journals. Against the background that every text is stuck for several years in a review loop and that the journals then insist on exclusive rights, it seems to be more and more the case that no more than one original argument per text is expedient. The next argument is then preferably submitted in the next text to the next journal. Accordingly, the texts in both low- and high-ranking international journals are generally flat. In this academic quantification machinery, however, which determines careers in many fields, contents are no longer decisive anyway. The only thing that counts is how many Peer Review articles an applicant can list and the respective rank of the relevant journals. Articles in anthologies are considered worthless publications in comparison; only publications with English-language publishers regarded as important can enhance the author's status. Monographs "count" less in comparison with Peer Review articles.

Peer Review procedures are repeatedly legitimized as being objective due to the anonymity. A positive review means that the submitted text is appreciated as being innovative and original by an imaginary, thoroughly heterogeneous scientific community represented, so to speak, by the reviewers.

The notion of being able to promote a theoretical or empirical strand considered important in the scientific community through the offer of a review, seems to be so seductive that even science- and institutional-critical 'young' academics talk over a beer about the important organs they have reviewed for or how long it will still take until they get around to it due to all their work.

It is not hard to understand how an academic career, long and drawn out and accompanied by many disappointments, requiring considerable stamina to reach a professorship, can be made less tedious, when one can anonymously judge texts by those who have been (presumably) more successful and are passing or have already passed one by. What feelings of omnipotence can be experienced, when – despite all the anonymization – a text appears to divulge a competitor or other known person as the author, when the judgment lies in one's own hands? The academic evaluation system through Peer Review is hardly questioned – not even among the circles of those who see themselves as critical contemporaries. Instead it is taken for granted and accepted and reproduced as such. Perhaps one reason for this is, if one takes part as a Peer Reviewer, taking the role of an anonymous judge sometimes seems to help compensate for the frustrations experienced in academia.

Yet while there may be some who do not leave the academic system increasingly based on quantifiable and thus economicizable criteria simply because there are ways and means to redirect some frustrations into power fantasies, the anonymous Peer Review process also produces other, far more problematic modes of subjectivation. In addition, there are older and often established reviewers – recognizable through the manner and gesture of their writing – who, in the shadow of anonymity, certainly do not treat the text to be reviewed with respect and constructive criticism.

In submitting a project to a three-country DACH project, for instance, the submitter was informed by one reviewer (it is often recognizable when the reviewer is a – usually older – man) from the Swiss National Fund (SNF) that the submitter clings to "voguish theories like gender and postcolonial studies", which are not to be considered worthy of support. It is well known to what extent the extreme right-wing Schweizer Volkspartei ("Swiss

People's Party": SVP) repeatedly harangues against gender studies in various media, refusing to take this research direction seriously academically in the gesture of an anti-feminism and anti-intellectualism (also to be found in Germany and Austria). However, if the SNF accepts this review and passes it on to the submitter, thus discrediting as voguish such an internationally reputable tradition of academic thinking and research as feminism, then this ultimately reflects poorly on the SNF, which must see itself confronted with the reproach of a lack of reputability. Another review from the SNF, on the other hand, took quite a positive view of the project, but the review was filled with more spelling errors than would ever be accepted in a seminar paper.

A lack of reputability is not only to be found in anti-feminism, however, but also within feminist journals in the German-speaking region. Several years ago, following a lecture at a conference, I was entreated to submit the lecture as an essay for the journal *Feministische Studien* ("Feminist Studies"), one of the few peer-review journals in German in the context of gender studies. This procedure is not due to the new publication economy (imported from the English-speaking region). The journal has been conducting its practice of anonymous reviewing throughout the more than thirty years of its existence.

After the revised lecture was submitted following the relevant style sheet and on time, a message arrived several weeks later that the text had been rejected. This was, of course, irritating, since the text had been submitted in response to an explicit invitation by the editor, and the essay version was not essentially different from the lecture version. In a publication process, however, decisions are made by more than one person, and the subsequent rejection can be part of the publication business. What was most irritating, though, and what leads to doubts about the professionalism of the

journal, were the two reviews that substantially resulted in the rejection. They were petulantly formulated, filled with resentment, and uninformed about some of the internationally relevant discourses mentioned in the text. One review, for example, asserted that the text offers an "exclusionary, hermetic, out-of-touch style of writing – what does 'coextensive' or 'postoperaist' mean? – which appears to have no interest in being comprehended or in the interdisciplinary aspirations of *Feministische Studien*."

"In the second section [...] we find out something about what Judith Butler thought about the subject. Several other names are also mentioned [...]. So far, this text seems to me to be a somewhat jumbled box of notes. There is nothing to be gained from reading it, and in my opinion it ultimately illuminates nothing." It is fortunate that the same text obviously does have an illuminating effect in the European-wide context of precarization research and has become a standard text.

A matter of taste – like the Peer Review procedure itself.

I.L.

"There is an incurred fee for this added service of $3000." Reproduction Conditions in Academic Publishing

In February 2012, when I was invited by the Book Review Editors to write a review for the journal *Constellations*, I accepted with no hesitation. The book to be reviewed was already on my reading list, and it seemed to me that *Constellations* – according to its subtitle: *An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory* – was not at all a bad place for the review to be published. After receiving very constructive comments on the review from the Review Editors

and undertaking a number of changes in response, I heard nothing more for a long time.

Then in May 2013 I received an anonymous email from the Wiley Publishing Group, in which Wiley_SingaporeC@aptaracorp.com informed me that I should read the galley proof of the review online and release it. Since I did not respond to this prompt within only a few days, I was thrown out of the *e-proof* system, and quite a few emails and people were needed to get my text back into the *e-proof* system again. Mutual overly polite apologies for the inconvenience followed. I could not help but think that this was all far too much effort for a small review that was not to exceed 1500 words.

The next email with *Wiley* in the sender address made especially one thing clear to me: the incident with the *e-proof* system had already admirably disciplined me. As soon as I read the email, I had an urgent, even stressful feeling that I must respond immediately to avoid the next ejection from the system and the associated communicative fall-out. The new email began with: "ACTION REQUIRED: Your article has been received by our production department. **You must now log into Author Services and sign your licence agreement. Failure to do so will prevent your article from being published.** Several days ago we invited you to visit Wiley-Blackwell Author Services to enjoy many benefits, including the ability to track the production status of your article." (Capitals and bold in the original, R.S.)

Among the lauded benefits was that one could choose whether the text should be published under open access or not. Great, I thought, of course my review should be published under open access. Apparently the critical and democratic claim in the subtitle of *Constellations* was not merely lip service, even though the

moment I clicked on the open access option I remembered that I had never been able to read *Constellations* online without paying or being part of an institution that paid for it. Apparently the open access policy of *Constellations* had now changed and texts could be made accessible to everyone interested in them.

The next Wiley email came from "Open Access Administration Assistant JOHN WILEY & SONS, INC." and informed me that I had still not yet paid my fee. I asked, which fee? What was meant was the fee for open access! Had I not read the small print before clicking on the open access option: "There is an incurred fee for this added service of $3000." The friendly suggestion from the Open Access Administration Assistant that my institution could also pay this fee, was not really helpful either, because what institution has $3000 on the side to pay for this kind of added service? In the end I had to beg to be permitted to cancel the license agreement I had signed online. The request was granted. I received the answer: "You will now be able to log back in and re-answer the licensing questions, to this time choosing No for OnlineOpen and then signing the correct license agreement."

The possibility of saying no is something I would have wished for in a different way (especially under the heading of critique and democracy) and for something different. Certainly not as the freedom to say no to the possibility of people being able to read my review free of charge.

R.S.

Repurchase of Knowledge is Possible

"The commodification of the product of intellectual labour has become routine, subject to fashion and political patronage, much

like any other commodity," argues Couze Venn ("On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason: A Questioning Note or Preamble", in: *Theory, Culture & Society* 1/1999, p. 60) in a brief response to Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant's critical statement ("On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason", in: ibid., p. 41-58) on the Americanization of academic publishing. The commercial interests and publication strategies of large publishing companies like Basil Blackwell or Routledge has led to the selection of research topics and themes according to their market value, the two French intellectuals argue (ibid., p. 47). And due to the market power of the major publishing companies, based on the global distribution of books and journals in English, these themes and tropes, as Bourdieu and Wacquant state, also become dominant in the academia worldwide. "Decisions of pure book marketing orient research and university teaching in the direction of homogenization and submission to fashions coming from America, when they do not fabricate wholesale 'disciplines' such as Cultural Studies" (ibid.). Such publishers are typically also capable of turning resistance against their own discursive power into a business opportunity, as shown in the present case: The critical statements appeared in a journal of one of the most powerful publishing houses, Sage Publications, which contributed significantly to the *somatic turn* in the social sciences with the introduction of the journal *Body & Society* in the mid-1990s, for instance.

In the German-speaking countries, publishers like UTB or Springer exercise a similar symbolic power in determining topics. It is nowadays common practice that authors bear the business risk for the publication of findings that are not market-conform at first glance, and they must therefore – at least until they have made a name for themselves – develop business skills in marketing their

own arguments. This economic game produces strange results in the journal market, like a proliferating trade with digitalized academic essays. As a member of the editorial board of the *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie* (Austrian Journal of Sociology, the organ of the Austrian Sociological Association), I am aware that the entire process of creating the journal depends on the unpaid collaboration of a whole series of academic experts. But at the end of the process several thousand Euros are transferred year after year to the publishing house Springer for printing the journal and for the digital publication of its essays. Springer's Open Choice policy specifies that texts can be made accessible for a broad audience free of charge for the bargain price of 2,200 Euro (+ VAT) – to be paid by the author. Unless, of course, supporting institutions like research institutes or universities are willing to take over and contribute to subsidizing not only the research process, but also private publishing companies. If no open access publication fee is paid, the essay – for which the author receives no payment at all – can subsequently be downloaded from Springer's homepage for 34,95 Euro.

In cases like this, we are dealing with an artificial scarcity of access to knowledge, which serves capitalist utilization interests, as economic barriers are created, which hinder either the publication or the public distribution of insights. The winners in this process of marketization of knowledge are certainly the major publishing companies; the losers are all the scholars who could profit from a free, cooperative exchange of knowledge independent of an economic logic of utilization.

O.P.

Insistent Incorporation

-----Ursprüngliche Nachricht-----
Von: onbehalfof+tcs+sagepub.co.uk@manuscriptcentral.com [mailto:onbehalfof+tcs+sagepub.co.uk@manuscriptcentral.com] Im Auftrag von tcs@sagepub.co.uk
Gesendet: Montag, 2. Juli 2012 17:18
An: Raunig Gerald
Betreff: Theory Culture & Society - Reviewer Request

Dear Gerald Raunig

Your name was recently suggested at one of our editorial board meetings as someone we should invite to become a peer-reviewer for our journal. This should involve only a minimum amount of commitment from you, and we will endeavour to invite you to review on an occasional basis only those manuscripts we receive that fall within your area of expertise. Each invitation will, of course, come with an option to agree or decline to review the relevant manuscript, so there will be no expectation of you agreeing each time.

With this in mind, we have added your name to the Theory, Culture & Society database in the hope that you will become one of our referees.

In recognition of the support of our anonymous referees, we have arranged with our publisher SAGE to offer free access to all 600+ SAGE journals for 30 days upon receipt of completed reviews and a 25% book discount on all SAGE books ordered online.

If you do not wish to review for the journal, please let us know and we will remove your details from our database with immediate effect.

Best wishes

Simon Dawes
Editorial Assistant
on behalf of Couze Venn, Managing Editor

From: gerald.raunig@zhdk.ch [gerald.raunig@zhdk.ch]
Sent: 03 July 2012 00:53
To: Theory, Culture & Society
Subject: AW: Theory Culture & Society - Reviewer Request

dear simon dawes, dear couze venn, dear mike featherstone,

thank you for your suggestion, but i have to say, i would prefer not to ...

some time ago i decided to strike against peer reviews, as long as they do not try to overcome their standardized formats. i agree with this quote from a leftist intellectual:

"15. The chief means for taming wild writing are academic journals, particularly in the form of the peer-reviewed journal. Originally introduced as a way of enhancing objectivity, the peer review has long since become an instrument of (self-)government, and as such bolsters existing structures and encourages their system of inclusion and exclusion."

so it would be nice if you could remove my personal belongings from the sage-database.

sincerely,

g.

-----Ursprüngliche Nachricht-----
Von: Theory, Culture & Society [mailto:tcs@sagepub.co.uk]
Gesendet: Mittwoch, 4. Juli 2012 12:22
An: Raunig Gerald
Betreff: RE: Theory Culture & Society - Reviewer Request

Dear Gerald - many thanks for your email; it's one we'll discuss!

I'll remove your name from our database so we harrass you no further.

Kind regards
Simon

Simon Dawes
Editorial Assistant: Theory, Culture & Society and Body & Society
Editor: TCS Website
http://www.sagepub.net/tcs/
http://theoryculturesociety.blogspot.com/

SAGE, the Independent Publishers Guild Academic and Professional Publisher of the Year 2012

-----Ursprüngliche Nachricht-----
Von: onbehalfof+tcs+sagepub.co.uk@manuscriptcentral.com [mailto:onbehalfof+tcs+sagepub.co.uk@manuscriptcentral.com] Im

Auftrag von tcs@sagepub.co.uk
Gesendet: Mittwoch, 27. März 2013 16:29
An: Raunig Gerald
Betreff: TCS Referee Request - 13-054-TCS

Dear Gerald Raunig

We would be very pleased if you would consider refereeing the following manuscript which has been submitted to Theory, Culture & Society:

[...]

Many thanks for your support for the journal.

Best wishes

Couze Venn
Managing Editor
for
Mike Featherstone
Editor