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INTRODUCTION

Introduction: Historicizing interventionist social knowledge, 1950s–1990s

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Among the common narratives of the twentieth century, in whatever tone, is the rise of intervention into economic affairs in both western and post-colonial countries on the basis of social scientific knowledge. One iconic protagonist of this story noted already amidst a crescendo in the narrative that exactly how tools of knowledge and intervention actually worked together was much messier than often assumed: "The pretense of total, integrated economic planning could and often does coexist quite amicably with, and may serve to cover up, unregenerated total improvisation in the actual undertaking and carrying out of investment projects" (Hirschman 1954, 47). In one of his lucid commentaries on the malaise of "development," Albert O. Hirschman took issue with "the myth" of the grand plan, so typical of development endeavors of the 1950s and 1960s, and the expectations placed on the planner's toolkit. At its heart, Hirschman's critique was epistemological: The figures needed for planning were only preliminary and imprecise; the discourse and rhetoric of the planner had little to do with actual practices on the ground. Even worse, international experts' talk about the possibilities of rational policy making did little more than cover up non-knowledge, a "lack of vision and utter confusion" (Alacevich 2021, 71).

Development planning is just one of the more obvious examples of postwar interventionism built on social scientific knowledge claims (see, for instance, Yaffe 2009; Young 2018; Serra 2018). While economists have probably been the most influential and visible policy experts, especially from the vantage of today (Berman 2022; Fontaine and Pooley 2021), sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, and psychologists had their part in the expanding post-1945 endeavor to found interventionist action of state, capital, and labor on the social sciences. Our topical issue examines this global trend through a collection of case studies on interventionist social knowledge between the 1950s and the 1990s. The contributions investigate various tools and devices of social science that were central to intervening, not only for an interventionist state (as in "New Deal Liberalism") but also for businesses, banks, and international organizations. Though the vision of the grand plan faded, intervention on the basis of social knowledge only grew.[1] Indeed, to return to Hirschman's statement above: some elements of his critique of the "grand plan" myth became common knowledge and sedimented into the rhetoric and tools of

[1]Our use of the term "knowledge" broadens the scope and shifts the emphasis away from academic science to include more spontaneous, "undisciplined" use of the social sciences but also bureaucratic knowledge. What counts as "social science" changes over time and place. We hew, for pragmatic reasons, to the arrangement of the disciplines typical of the early post-WWII decades in the US, in which all of the disciplines relevant to this special issue were called "social" science. We find useful the definition of social knowledge offered by Camic et al. (2011, 3), which encompasses "descriptive information and analytical statements" about human beings and aggregate or collective units, including both "normative statements" and "technologies and tools of knowledge making."

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"international development" while leaving its actual practices virtually unchanged (Eiden-Offe 2013, 1114). In this issue, we wonder about such continuities in practices, modes, and forms of interventionist knowledge, as well as the ironies they elicit—that is, how knowledge was used in different ways than intended, led to different outcomes than expected, or was simply cast aside. Such ironies track with the twists and turns that knowledge undergoes through its fashioning and use in concrete situations in ways that may cut across more salient historical ruptures, another central concern of the papers collected here.

With these questions in mind, we invited scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds with a high-resolution focus on interventionist social knowledge. The primary goal of our contributors was to study the practices of fashioning and deploying interventionist tools in specific settings. In all of the cases presented here, interventionist action was aimed at capitalist development. Rather than focusing on a single political and historical moment (postcolonial development; the neoliberal turn in economic governance) or scientific discipline, we wished to collect a set of articles that followed a piece of social knowledge in a variety of settings. Work of this sort depends on source material that is daunting to acquire and to patch together.[2] The articles range from the techniques of transparency and control that made international donors support Colombia's ten-year-plan (Andrés Guiot-Isaac) to the anthropological fieldwork that informed the French *écomusée* as a tool of regional development (Niki Rhyner); from the behavioral-psychological research underlying the real-world experiments of a consultancy business that sought to catalyze Curaçaoans' business mentality (Lukas Held) to the informal networking and personal engagements of an international expert planning "the economy" of postcolonial Nigeria to keep it safe for the "free market" of capitalism (Mary S. Morgan); from the clandestine circulation of Belgian foresight scenarios across political elites that brought about a major policy shift (Zoé Evrard) to the mixture of social scientific data and mythic visions that shaped ideas of "the New Economy" and a corresponding federal jobs retraining program during the Clinton administration in the US (Lee Vinsel).

More often than not, the actors in these cases saw themselves failing despite the effort they put into the fashioning of ideas and tools for intervention. Things got messy. Yet this will not be another exposé on the aporias and failures of planning from the privileged position of hindsight. Instead, our contributions historicize interventionist knowledge in two specific ways. First, they analyze the inner workings of interventionist tools, the ways they were used in practice, how they produced power and unevenness, and how they shaped the course of intervention as they intersected with bureaucratic procedures, political processes, and networks of expertise. Second, these studies are historical, linked to larger processes and narratives—but without being fully subsumable to prevailing periodizations such as a decisive "neoliberal turn"; shifts in the disciplinary hierarchy and division of labor (Fontaine and Pooley 2021; Backhouse and Fontaine 2010), patronage (Crowther-Heyck 2006; Solovey 2013), and politics of method (Steinmetz 2005); "Cold War social science" (Solovey and Cravens 2012; Gilman 2016; Solovey and Dayé 2021); or a decentering of the social in favor of the individual (Ross 2021, 2022). Overall, this issue ponders over new challenges to historiography that result from leaving behind narrative devices such as ideological or intellectual consistency or the triumph of a particular worldview. Individually and together, the case studies do not aim primarily at a periodization of more versus less intervention but at qualitative dynamics. They seek not turning points so much as twists and turns. And yet, as we will see below, questions about the supposed breaks of the 1970s stimulated our selection of papers and animated our discussions together.

[2]Indeed, we could imagine many different clusters of topics around interventionist social knowledge. As it turned out, our thematic focus and analytical points developed over a series of exchanges: some contributors came together already at the History of Economics Society 2021 annual meeting; others joined for an authors' workshop with financial support from the University of Lucerne's Forschungskommission in January 2023 and further digital meetings.

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Interventionist knowledge

Representing also means intervening, to use Ian Hacking's felicitous formulation (Hacking 1983). Researchers do not deal with "the phenomena themselves." They handle devices, make calculations, fill tables, synthesize notes, and thereby shape the very objects they observe, measure, and theorize.[3] Such a grasp of research as a material practice grounds our investigation of interventionist social knowledge. Its devices are not merely instruments for research that prepare or shape a phenomenon for controlled investigation. From the start, they are meant to change an ongoing world (MacKenzie 2006; Vogl 2014; Morgan 2020; Boumans forthcoming).[4] Interventionist knowledge often brings together multiple forms such as models, measurements, scenarios, protocols, audiovisual documentation, or questionnaires. To be practical for action, interventionist knowledge not only has to deal technically with whatever object it claims to be knowledge of. It also has to (at least appear to) tackle the intricacies of intervening in practice, for which it is supposed to provide knowledge. Therefore, it comprises both the knowledge itself—the reasoning and actions it allows (and excludes)—and the arguments that fashion that knowledge as relevant, useful, or true for intervention, for instance in policy briefs and public recommendations. The contributions to this issue look at the ways in which tools and techniques are invoked for interventionist aims and then come to frame the debate—over foreign loan applications, full employment, or education policies, for example.

Our topical issue contributes to scholarship that shifts focus away from the classic sites of the history of science (laboratories, field stations, museums, universities) toward settings outside academe such as planning bureaus, tourist offices, executive cabinets, or consulting firms. Not only in the laboratory or in the classroom but also in these places does social knowledge shape and reshape the relevant objects, such as "underdeveloped" regions or "human capital," in order to act on them. In contrast to conceptions of "basic" science (as self-interested experimenting and finding out), which is then "applied" in policy-making for specific political purposes, or of findings of applied work filtering back into basic research, in our cases interventionist tools do not tend to draw such borders in the first place. In this vein, our endeavor adds to a vast and varied literature— already present within the social sciences themselves during the period we examine—that looks at interventions shaped by social knowledge.[5]

[3]See, for instance, Pickering 1984; Daston 2000; Knorr-Cetina 1999; Rheinberger 1997. On the practices of representing and intervening in the social sciences, see Camic et al. 2011; Morgan 2012; Isaac 2010; Breslau and Yonay 1999; in social statistics, see Didier 2020, Stapleford 2009, Schlicht et al. 2021.

[4]The interventionist, suggestive nature of economic knowledge could be dated back, as Vogl 2014 has done, to the "political arithmetic" of the seventeenth century. With its focus on the specific tools and concrete practices of interventionist knowledge, this special issue touches upon themes sometimes framed as the "performativity" of economics. The related literature studies primarily the devices used to construct markets and the specific forms of agency they afford. Since the contributions to this issue are concerned with the making and the use of policy devices in pre-existing environments, their ontological effects are probably more difficult to pin down than the effects of devices in the designed environments of market design and financial markets. For the discussions and stakes of the performativity of economics, see MacKenzie et al. 2007, Boldyrev and Svetlova 2016, and Brisset 2018.

[5]Already in the mid-twentieth century, for example, the sociologists Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton, who made and promoted interventionist social knowledge, described and theorized the reciprocity between "basic" and "applied" knowledge and even, especially Lazarsfeld, in light of this link sought to build social scientific training around case studies capturing the twists and turns of social knowledge in practice (Merton 1957; Lazarsfeld 1972, 1975; on training, Hounshell 2017). And, following from his epistemological critique of the "grand plan" introduced above, Hirschman made the examination of case studies central to development economics. With the empirical social research of Lazarsfeld and others as an epochal marker, literature on the "scientification of the social" has historicized the role of social scientific expertise in public policy and administration, originally as a succession of modes and sites of intervention, each characterized by leading disciplines and their toolkits (Raphael 1996; Reinecke and Mergel 2012; Brückweh et al. 2012). In a Foucauldian vein, a literature on "governmental technologies" has examined the reliance of political power on an ensemble of discourses, practices, and institutions, which shape and reshape the relevant objects in the first place (Foucault 1977–1978; Miller and Rose 1990; Bröckling et al. 2000). Similarly, the sociology of expertise has focused on the "movement of intervention," decentering the role of both ideas and individual agents (Buchholz and Eyal 2010, 128; Eyal 2019). Scholarly work on the history of bureaucratic

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This topical issue takes a cue from these lines of inquiry and attends to the many ways in which interventionist social knowledge shapes and is shaped by practices of intervening. More specifically, our contributions examine a collection of interventionist tools derived from the social sciences and trace their workings when deployed to intervene into wholes like "the economy" or "the society." In specific entanglements, they not only provided knowledge about aspects of society/economy but also worked as technologies of trust, media of persuasion, means of coalition-building, marketing materials, and surveillance instruments.

All the papers in this special issue investigate social scientific knowledge that was meant to intervene, but these knowledge-based interventions were not necessarily successful. Interventionist knowledge was invoked for different political aims but developed in ways outside the control of any single actor. Concerned with both the politics and the political uses of knowledge tools, our authors found instances in which they were used in different ways than intended, contributed to different outcomes than expected, or were simply ignored. These instances are neither examples of the grand failure of large-scale planning endeavors (Scott 1998), nor examples of theories failing in the face of social or economic disruptions (like the often-told story of the replacement of "Keynesianism" by "Monetarism" supposedly due to structural crises in the 1970s). Given the manifold interactions that shape the outcome of interventions, our cases feature several smaller failures to intervene successfully (according to the intentions of interveners) or to intervene at all. While imbued with political intent and specific goals, interventionist knowledge was subject to unexpected twists and turns, surprising appropriations and redirections, and often "failures"—both in the sense of lacking the intended effects and of actors losing the power to intervene as conditions change.

Three main themes

Attending to the epistemic specifics of interventionist practices and their effects, there were three themes across our cases that seemed most remarkable to us: (a) the various, often conglomerate forms that interventionist knowledge takes in the course of intervention, (b) the adaptability of different types of interveners, and (c) the overall relativity of expertise.

(a) Interventionist knowledge as conglomerate

Our contributions show that interventionist knowledge comes in various forms that are typically conglomerates of different things: words and numbers, models and stories, and so on—against the tempting assumption, challenged by the rich scholarship on quantification, that it is really "hard" numbers and established theories that decide and guide. Indeed, in public expert statements, most of the interveners investigated in this issue probably argued for the value of their knowledge for its quantitative, positive, or formal character. Studying their interventionist work in practice, however, blurs the boundaries between the quantitative and the qualitative, the numerical and the verbal, the scholarly and the political, the formal and the informal. This is most apparent in the numbers created through various econometric devices and planning models in Belgium and in Colombia. Such models were based on their constructors' judgments (for instance, with regard to choice of what to include and exclude in a measurement) and required all kinds of storytelling when it came to linking different quantitative techniques and applying the results to policy problems at hand (Acosta et al. 2024; Halsmayer 2017; Maas 2018). In his contribution, Andrés Guiot-Isaac argues that Colombia's Ten-year Plan, marketed as a guarantee for democratic and liberal governance in the 1960s, mobilized a variety of textual strategies and an "international web of economic experts" to enable it to work as an "instrument of invigilation and control" as

knowledge has turned in particular to the epistemic processes involved in administrative procedures (Becker and Clark 2013; Felten and von Oertzen 2020).

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required by international lending agencies and domestic businesses. In the Belgian case, as Zoé Evrard emphasizes, the numbers were encased in the qualitative claims of a "scenario" primed to build coalitions in elite policy circles, which eventually ensured the survival of the Planning Bureau after 1980. Sometimes it is not the story told about numbers but the act of being measured that is the means of intervention. As Lukas Held shows, psychologists in Curaçao used the Thematic Apperception Test not just for the well-trodden purpose of measuring the subjects' elicited response (in this case, "achievement motivation") but as a "training device" to inculcate "achievement-oriented thinking, which would ultimately shape their real-world actions." Here words and numbers were linked at multiple points: both to design and score the test and to use its results as a stimulus to reflection and self-cultivation.

(b) The adaptability of intervener-personae

The following pages introduce a collection of interveners: policy entrepreneurs, planners, modelers, consultants, and institution-builders. As in the literature on scientific personae, it is not so much social markers that determine their actions and allegiances (Daston and Sibum 2003; Thorpe and Shapin 2000, 2008, 2010; Schlicht et al. 2021; Porter 2006a). Rather, they are constituted through the "stuff" that make an expert effective as intervener: their specific skills, kinds of knowledge, and types of authority. In other words, all that contributed to the way in which "forms of expertise can acquire value as public interventions" (Buchholz and Eyal 2010, 120). In this way, the studies in this issue accentuate not so much qualities like charisma but rather characteristics that are constituted in relation to the tools the experts employed, and to other actors in the relevant fields of intervention.

Given that interventionist tools need to fulfil requirements in various spheres, interveners also need to mediate between them (such as between research and politics, Dekker 2021; or between science and activism, Germann et al. 2022). While often highly invested in the universal aspirations of their abstract knowledge, in their activities "on the ground," they struggle and have to (spontaneously) develop strategies for how to handle everything that departs from their assumptions and does not fit their expectations. In the case of economist Wolfgang Stolper's planning work in postcolonial Nigeria, his efforts to find out about regionally specific economic preferences were not about investigating "culture," nor were they just information to be fed into a standardized international recipe for development. In the first place, as Mary Morgan argues, they promised local buy-in to the plan. Stolper's diary portrays a planner hustling to find numbers and making them work together, building relationships with officials and informants to get access to local knowledge, shaping the knowledge gained through these networks to fit his devices.

Putting together the knowledge basis for policy intervention and then attaining a position from which to shape policy can be a long process, not only of solitary work but of collaboration, coalition-building, and public relations. Developing a sense, as Lee Vinsel puts it, of "when and how a structural change in society is occurring, and then know[ing] what to do about it" is a matter of individual cognition but also of being a part of the ongoing conversation. What earned Robert Reich a job as Bill Clinton's Secretary of Labor was his knack for pulling together social statistics, apparent trends, and resonant concepts into myths—as he put it, "a set of orienting ideas" to "explain reality and teach us what is expected of us in light of that reality." This was the tool of a particular type of party-aligned public intellectual. Yet another example for the political acting of an intervener is the Belgian Planning Commissioner Robert Maldague, a "mutualistic symbiont" in Evrard's usage, who managed to preserve the Planning Bureau precisely by circumventing established procedures. His use of informal channels to circulate "The Impossible Scenario" was as much part of the repertoire of interventionist practice as the many, likely more common ways of connecting formal and informal spheres of advice-giving (Mata and Medema 2013; Cherrier 2019; Hounshell and Halsmayer 2020).

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(c) The overall relativity of expertise

Attention to the activities and knowledge infrastructures involved in intervening pointed us to the relativity of expertise, the fact that it is always dependent on something else.

Even in cases where interventionist knowledge was captured in hard numbers, quantitative knowledge was in some essential ways sidelined. In 1960s Nigeria, Wolfgang Stolper saw his painstaking efforts to offer reliable economic knowledge upended when his rival Prasad changed one of his numbers. In this way, Morgan argues, he made the whole economic development plan inconsistent, thus throwing its entire factual basis into doubt. Even those responsible for the production of numbers, in an executive capacity at least, could push them aside in favor of softer, less formalized means of deciding and forecasting, as we see through both the "mythical" popular policy writings of Reich and his justifications for intervention while Secretary of Labor. As Vinsel shows, Reich perhaps misinterpreted and simply ignored the statistics projected by the agency he supervised, and yet the legislation ultimately failed for political reasons (when national debt became the salient concern), rather than for any perceived flaws of its knowledge basis. Thus, whereas numbers can be used to "mak[e] decisions without seeming to decide" (Porter 1995, 8) or to serve as precise (rather than necessarily accurate) points around which to set priorities and organize democratic debate (Porter 2006b), they may also be simply disregarded and rendered irrelevant in multiple ways.

Interventionist knowledge, quantitative or not, is vulnerable to the vagaries of time. As Jo Guldi (2022, 152–206) shows—not with reference to numbers but to cartography and bibliography for international development—tools of knowledge may miss their moment: born in one setting, they may only be finally available to their intended users (if ever) once the political context has shifted. Thus, seen from the perspective of tools, interventionist social knowledge is vulnerable in a way additional to Gil Eyal's diagnosis of "contentious and crisis-prone" regulatory science in general, caught as it is in the "middle lane" between "open-forward" pure science and "closed," decisive law (Eyal 2019, 8).

Indeed, the relationship between intervention and disciplinary knowledge can go in multiple directions, can diverge and develop at different time scales, is often vulnerable to disruption, and can be obscure to actors and historians alike. Intervention does not only start from a demand for policy prescriptions: it can also provide an occasion for social scientists to work out preexisting problems within their respective disciplines. McBer & Company's foray in Curaçao was attractive to the psychologist David McClelland for its potential breakthrough in psychological theory, in particular by resolving what Lukas Held calls the "problem of circularity." But this outcome ostensibly depended on the intervention proceeding as planned. When the intervention failed to achieve the desired reformation of its Curaçaoan subjects, McClelland's colleagues blamed local cultural factors. Since these were outside their control, the anticipated feedback into disciplinary knowledge was also beyond their grasp. For French ethnographers, as Niki Rhyner argues, the economically troubled Central Massif provided a setting for reshaping the discipline, away from the nostalgic study of dying cultures and towards the investigation of "present and possible—modern—futures." In the process of this double modernization of science and local society, the Aubrac region became a "model place" for social scientists, a site of repeated investigation and intervention.

Sometimes, perhaps most of the time, the place of disciplinary knowledge in interventions is much less clear, which we see in the case of the lawyer Reich's self-conscious myth-making about economic trends: his picture of the future was neither spontaneous nor, so to speak, disciplined. Such murkiness leaves actors and policies vulnerable to critique from contemporaries with more established disciplinary *bona fides* and challenges retrospective scholarly analysis. Interpretation is yet more vexed in cases like the Clinton-era Reemployment Act, in which the intervention never comes to pass, where expertise can be traced only up to a certain point, where disciplinary social knowledge is indeed perceptible in bits and pieces but never put to the test. Or, to draw on another

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case, tools originally belonging to an overturned theoretical disciplinary paradigm may persist in interventionist practice: so-called "Keynesian" modeling informed the Belgian planning scenarios even after it endured harsh attack from monetarists, and this in support of an austerity politics that looks something like the neoliberalism that is said to be Keynesianism's ideological other. Such fine-grained cases help us understand better how, as with the persistence of "Keynesian" macro modeling in US government and business after its withering critique within the economics discipline, "institutional necessity" can buoy social knowledge regardless of its "intellectual legitimacy" or supposed political valances (Shenk 2023, 21; Cherrier 2014; Boumans and Duarte 2019; Halsmayer 2024, epilogue).

Narratives

Taken together, these themes (interventionist knowledge as conglomerate, the adaptability of intervener-personae, and the overall relativity of expertise) open our cases up to the above-mentioned twists and turns. Interventionist knowledge takes on its own dynamics. Tools take on a life of their own, external events change the course of intervention, and internal frictions make actors ignore the knowledge in play. This leads to all manner of ironies through which knowledge originally conceived and fashioned for one purpose is redirected and taken up for another and thereby gains unanticipated meanings, with unintended implications. All of this affects intervention in a way that is not simply about failure but also not simply about influence.[6] Taking the thought a step further, this might mean that the dynamics of social scientific intervention resist assimilation into the available historical frameworks when it comes to the great shifts of the 1970s and 1980s.

If we were to include international organizations, businesses, banks as well as radical and alternative movements into stories of intervention and widen our chronological frame of interpretation, the supposed great shift from planning euphoria in the 1960s to planning pessimism in the 1970s would appear largely overstated (Sorg 2025; Blacker et al. 2024; Offner 2019). As our contributors argue, even within state planning, social scientific knowledge infrastructures remain significant throughout the decades. In the Belgian case, the Planning Bureau was in fact only introduced in 1970. Its knowledge infrastructure, as Evrard details, was repurposed with the Belgian neoliberalization process but essentially remained constant even when state bureaucracies transitioned towards neoliberal policies. Tracing the life of the Colombian ten-year-plan, Guiot-Isaac emphasizes that a shift from macro-scale comprehensive planning (the grand plan, in Hirschman's words above) to smaller-scale development interventions was already underway in the 1960s. Moreover, his case underlines how the malleability of planning procedures leads to their enduring resilience. These examples support a more nuanced storytelling that highlights the *longue durée* of planning apparatuses. It is not just that planning tools and practices persisted even after the idea of the grand plan lost traction in the 1970s (Morgan 2020). New ways to interpret this shift emerge if we widen the chronological frame without losing sight of the dynamics of interventionist knowledge: as Blacker et al. (2024, 2) argue, "colonial plans re-emerge[d] as the decolonizing technologies of newly independent national states" and were further "reworked as the epistemological infrastructures of neoliberal late capitalism." Specific social knowledge infrastructures can be "sites where the past shapes the

[6]There appears to be broader contemporary interest in organized study of interventionist or applied knowledge in the humanities and social sciences, with shared analytical themes. Indeed, our attention to the situatedness of knowledge in this particular way resonates with ongoing work at the "Applied Humanities" center for advanced studies at the Humboldt University, Berlin: as Viktoria Tkaczyk and Anke te Heesen put it, the application of knowledge transforms both the body of knowledge and its contexts and infrastructures. They, too, emphasize the conglomerate quality ("hybrid arrangement", "heterogeneous") and the complex ("pluralistic and iterative"), multiple temporalities of interventionist knowledge. Thank you to Tkaczyk and te Heesen for generously sharing the manuscript of their article in preparation, "Angewandte Geisteswissenschaften: Genealogie und Politik" (July 18, 2025).

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present," as sociologist Daniel Hirschman deftly captures with respect to national censuses or national income and product accounts used in planning (Hirschman 2021, 777). In the case of personal income statistics, prevailing knowledge infrastructures in the 1970s–90s rendered top incomes practically invisible, which in turn "made it possible for most scholars to miss the rise of the 1%" (ibid. 740). Constructed in the mid-twentieth century, these infrastructures facilitated specific forms of inequality knowledge (and non-knowledge) for the rest of the century, across the rupture usually situated in the 1970s.

In this sense, our contributions complement literature that deals with the history of the social sciences and sidelines a "neoliberal turn" as the central event. Amy Offner has reinterpreted the post-1970s period as a "sorting out" of previously entangled aspects of the "mixed economy" into Big-State Liberalism and neoliberal downsizing, or withdrawal of the state (Offner 2019). In a comparable gesture, Held points out that, within postcolonial Curaçao, David McClelland's "approach to development on the basis of achievement motivation training resembled what later became known as neoliberalism: a vision of progress driven primarily by entrepreneurial activity rather than state lead industrialization and agricultural policy." The percolation of interventionist "industrial policy" thinking in the 1980s and early 1990s in the US (Vinsel, in this issue) adds another perspective to studies asserting a decisive neoliberal turn in the Reagan years (Leendertz 2022), a neoliberal-neoconservative intertwining (Cooper 2017), or the rise of a market-oriented "third way" progressivism (Mudge 2018, Andersson 2009) that persisted into the next century. Was the recourse to industrial policy another episode of the mixed economy, guided by social scientific understandings of technological trends, labor markets, and alternative modes of regulating capitalism? Whereas a response to the 1970s crisis dominant in historical narratives was the enforcement of neoliberal reforms, the cultivation of an "enrichment basin" in the French Central Massif region examined by Rhyner was a strikingly different approach to economic intervention. Moreover, it was through participatory institution-building and knowledge creation for an enrichment economy, not the inscription of culture into intellectual property that John and Jean Comaroff characterize as "neoliberal" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 33–44), that this process unfolded. In her study of US policymaking, Elizabeth Popp Berman tracks a deep continuity across the supposed neoliberal rupture. In her account, the progressive dissemination of a set of analytical tools, emanating from a few Trojan horses ushered in during the Great Society era, brings about the dominance of "thinking like an economist": the value of efficiency inherent in these tools narrowed the scope of policy, regardless of actors' political orientation (Berman 2022). The papers presented here resonate with Berman's approach insofar as they track the stubborn agency of tools and the resulting ironic relations with political constituencies and aims.

Not only in pursuit of an overarching narrative but also in smaller case studies such as those presented here, there is much to be gained from analyzing the terms set by interventionist tools themselves rather than charting more vs. less (state) intervention or sorting into political-ideological camps. Such cases, we hope, not only amount to a kind of "natural history" collection of specimens (Kohler 2007, 433), interesting both in their own right and for the patterns that emerge from their arrangement; they also keep our attention on the omnipresence of intervention, which general accounts of the decline of the "project state" (Maier 2023) may otherwise obscure.

In these ways, our topical issue works against the tempting assumption that knowledge-based intervention is predetermined by grand political and intellectual ruptures. It is not just alternative trajectories, parallel histories, contingencies, or continuities that we wish to foreground—but all of the intricate ways that interventionist knowledge actually works. In providing a richer picture of different kinds of knowledge and forms of intervention, our perspective does not merely complicate or complexify existing approaches but, at best, opens up a different horizon for where such study might lead us.

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