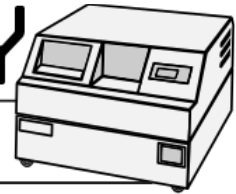


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INTERDISCIPLINARY SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY STUDIES
WORKING GROUP AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



"How an algorithm shook Cold War economics"

Jérémy Grosman, Université de Namur, Belgium

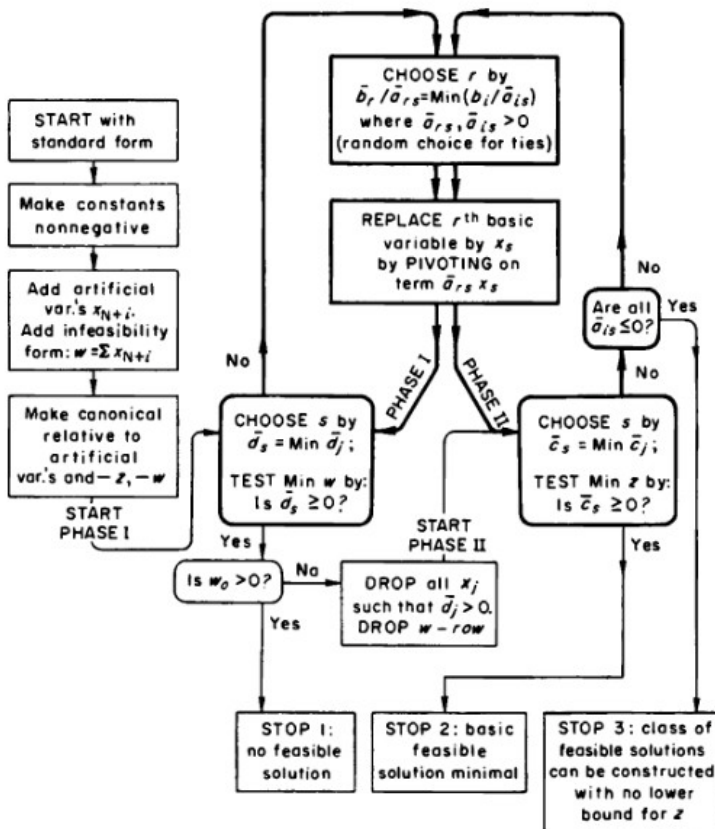


Figure 5-2-I. Flow diagram of the simplex method.

In 1936, in response to a government request, the Soviet mathematician Leonid Vitaliyevich Kantorovich developed a method by which factories could be restructured in order to optimise their production. For the next twenty years this work remained largely unknown: some of the multipliers used in the algorithm were suspected of not complying with Marxist theory.

The approach became known as the 'Simplex Algorithm'. It provoked controversy during the Cold War as it promised to mathematically optimise decision-making at micro- as well as macro levels. For advocates, this meant the rationales of right and left were recast as ideology rather than science. Whereas opponents of the algorithm decried it as a tool of socialism or capitalism, depending on their respective political position.

With this history in mind, how can an algorithm have politics?

7th November, 5pm. Oxford University School of Geography & the Environment, Seminar Room B

InSIS at Saïd Business School and the School of Geography and the Environment



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