Introduction

Public Sociology in the Making

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Sociology, like some of its disciplinary neighbours, seems to be often regarded by others as an unhappy endeavour. Even some of its practitioners complain occasionally about failed achievements and the lack of acknowledgement. Sociologists just do not, so the complaint goes, get the credit they deserve. Politics and the larger public do not seem to pay attention to sociology’s recommendations of how best to solve the pressing social problems of our societies. Occasionally insights from sociology are even regarded to be beyond consideration. Why is it, one may ask, that other scientific disciplines are treated much more favourably? And looking at the tragic-comedy side of things, sociologists do not even seem to be able to recognise themselves in fictional figures as they appear for example in David Lodge’s and Malcolm Bradbury’s novels. Are we that humourless? Do we not deserve better?

When in May 2012 the Library of Congress awarded former president of Brazil Fernando Henrique Cardoso the John W. Kluge Prize for the Study of Humanity the Executive Officer of the American Sociological Association, Sally T. Hillsman, claimed that “sociologists are constantly making important contributions to society and the selection of Cardoso reinforces the significance of our efforts”. What she failed to say was that Michael Burawoy’s presidential address “For Public Sociology” presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association made more headlines than the prize winner Cardoso, at least in the sociology community. What was even more remarkable was that Burawoy’s speech actually conveyed the very same message, namely that sociology was of use and indeed contributes to society in many ways and on a regular basis. Seldom had an ASA presidential address received so much attention. Ever since Burawoy delivered his public sociology address, the discussion about sociology’s role, its functions, impact and broader meaning has not abated (Burawoy 2005). The discussion peaked two years later with a full-length academic publication dedicated to the topic, including a longer version of Burawoy’s speech together with responses from more than a dozen prominent American sociologists (Clawson et al. 2007). In retrospect its success and perhaps its broad appeal at the time may also have obscured some of the 2007 collection’s more problematic aspects. For example, it was almost impossible to understand Burawoy and the other discussants’ contributions without knowing something about the peculiar American conditions to which most chapters referred, either directly or indirectly. To be fair, most participants were aware of this limitation, yet, the remarkable thing was that they
decided not to do much about it. Rather, the majority of contributors thought it more useful to simply appeal to the sociological community to be more inclusive, cosmopolitan and international. Enlightened attitudes, so the argument went, would, at least in the long run, help to de-provincialize American sociology departments and liberate them from their narrow national perspective and their often all-too narrow specialisation. Apart from such well-intended, yet presumably hopelessly ineffective appeals, only a few attempts were made to look beyond American borders.

While Burawoy himself hinted at least at the possibility that his intervention could be seen as appealing only to American circumstances and conditions – implied here is that his discourse could also be interpreted as one that presented itself as if it were a universal problem – this suggestion was, we suggest, never picked up by the respondents. Apparently, the rest of the world was something to be referred to in passing, a complex matter that was better left to linguists, students of comparative politics or social anthropologists than to American sociologists. Globalism, yes – showing some interest in the world, maybe less so!

Burawoy’s speeches have been understood, quite correctly, as a call to arms, or to put it in a less bellicose fashion, as an appeal to fellow sociologists to enrich their role set by paying more attention to their broader potential public impact. In contrast to other scholarly communities, sociologists seem to be somewhat unhappy with their own peers and become even unhappier if their attempt to reach out does not receive as much applause as they think it should. Sociological activists scorn fellow sociologists who are satisfied with a restricted reception by their own peers and limited public. To stay with our prominent example, Burawoy’s four-fold table of professional, policy, critical and public sociology automatically presupposes that ‘true’ sociologists must reach out to extra-academic audiences, something that other social scientists would refuse to accept as part of their professional identity. Instead, for the latter such engagement is left to the self-definition of what it means to be a citizen outside the republic of knowledge. Some sociologists would call it a case of under- or better over-developed role crystallization while others might be more prone to subscribe to Erving Goffman’s dry remark about some sociologists “who …combat false consciousness and awake people to their true interests” and who, in any case, will surely have their work cut out for them “because the sleep is very deep”. To this, obviously ironic remark, Goffman added that he did not see it as his task “to provide a lullaby but merely to sneak in and watch the way the people snore”. It is obvious, that such a detached attitude is miles away from the weltanschauung of todays’ engaged sociologists.

Looking at some of the current debates about public sociology one can get the strong impression that institutional political amnesia seemed to have befallen its advocates and practitioners. For example, while obligatory references are made to the interventions of a Robert S. Lynd, a C. Wright Mills or an Alvin Gouldner, the discussion showed little or no awareness of some of the most important twentieth-century experiences and related debates. Not one attempt was made to
comprehensively contextualise sociological debates about public sociology. This
is even odder when we consider that the declared aim of the advocates of public
sociology is to reach out beyond the academic milieu and disciplinary boundaries.
Granted, the usual suspects, Pierre Bourdieu and Jürgen Habermas for example,
were briefly mentioned – we presume mainly because of their attempt to analyse
the public and its structures and the role that the reception of enlightened ideas
plays in their work. But Burawoy and almost all of the other discussants totally
missed out on any serious discussion about the more socially ambiguous and
historically complex dimension of the relationship between intellectuals, power
and the public sphere from the past. Relevant contributions that discussed the
public role of intellectuals in more critical terms, particularly those stemming
from the European sociological tradition, were totally ignored. It was as if Max
Weber, Raymond Aron, Ralf Dahrendorf and Wolf Lepenies had never existed.
But it was not only the case that any non-American debates were obliterated,
the omission of references to any past American debates that reached beyond
politically correct left-wing causes must give cause for concern. True, Thorstein
Veblen, John Dewey, C. Wright Mills and Lewis A. Coser were seen as being
worth a passing remark, however, as significant scholars they were sold short,
their names serving only as keyword prompters for the radical public sociology
agenda. Others like Talcott Parsons, Edward Shils, Daniel Bell, Jeffrey C. Goldfarb
and Jeffrey Alexander, who have all discussed the complex connection between
ideas, power and society but who would obviously not be allowed to ride on the
left-wing ticket, were equally blanked out, not to mention the numerous other
contributions that would fill a small library: about the nature of totalitarianism, the
Cold War, imperialism and decolonization and the Fall of the Berlin Wall and how
intellectuals (including sociologists) reacted to each of these events or historical
constellations. The obliteration of these experiences in a debate about public
sociology suggests that not a few of its most prominent advocates not only seemed
oblivious to some of the most important twentieth-century debates but also of the
history of their own discipline. This does not bode well for any future debate about
sociology and its publics.

One may speculate on why the discussion of the nature of public sociology
contained no convincing concrete examples or why there was no reference
whatsoever to historical and sociological cases that would have helped the
interested reader to understand some of the complexities involved. To put it
bluntly, the public sociology discussion lacked sociological imagination. It
never explained or elaborated on how exactly a sociologist can become a major
intellectual or public sociologist; there was nothing or very little about reputation
building, nor about the finer points of the sociology of ideas or how men and
women of ideas communicate with different publics. No example was given of
how sociological discourse has impacted on the functioning of social institutions
and local and state governments. The absence of any historical references and the
lack of any detailed discussion of the complexities and contradictions involved
made the discussion about public sociology a somewhat sterile and problem-free
exercise. To paraphrase Robert K. Merton, it made society appear as if it were a 
body without an appendix, and it turned sociology, a discipline that claims to study 
societal relations, into little more than an ambitious yet in the end failed public 
relations exercise.

Was it a mission impossible? That one could do better than Burawoy and his 
sympathetic discussants is demonstrated by Robert S. Lynd, author (together 
with his wife Helen Lynd) of the famous Middletown studies. On the death of 
C. Wright Mills (one of Michael Burawoy’s heroes), Lynd, a colleague of Mills 
at Columbia, warned the sociological community of the dangers of selling the 
publicly engaged sociologist short. He argued that it would be a serious mistake 
to portray C. Wright Mills solely as a sociological muckraker and radical Texan 
but not pay respect to the serious sociologist and intellectual that he also was. It 
seemed almost as if colleagues were only perceptive of Mills’ political and public 
interventions, particularly his media appearances, the Cuba book Listen Yankee! or 
his The Causes of World War III, but not the subversive and enlightening quality of 
his many other academic works, such as his essays on the sociology of knowledge 
or White Collar. Indeed, if there is one thing that characterises the trials and 17
tribulations of C. Wright Mills, it was his attempt to identify the larger tendencies 
in society – tendencies which he attempted to understand in order to change them. 
How successful he was in his undertaking is open to debate; however, it would not 
be unfair to the late Mills to say that he had put the will to change and influence 
society before the attempt to fully understand it.

From Lynd’s warning not to sell Mills short to the contemporary debate about public sociology is but a small step: Indeed, it appears as if the current call for a new public sociology is caught in exactly the same trap that Lynd warned against. There is of course nothing wrong with the attempt at making sociology more relevant by catering to the public’s interests or by producing and offering more ‘useful’ knowledge. However, and this may be the lasting legacy and importance of Lynd’s message, we should always bear in mind that ‘the cause’ should not be allowed to become more important than the explanation.

Indeed, we could argue that Lynd was onto something. Much earlier, actually almost 23 years before Mills’ death provoked the comments referred to above, Lynd had given a series of talks at Princeton University, which were later published as Knowledge for What? The Place of Social Science in American Culture. Its author addressed the complications and potential risks that a publically engaged social scientist was facing, particularly when confronted with a systemic crisis (Lynd wrote his book on the eve of the Second World War and at a time when the effects of the Depression could still be felt). Lynd regarded social scientists as trustees who were part of the culture they were studying. Consequentially “(t)he social scientist finds himself caught … between the rival demands for straight, incisive, and, if need be, radically divergent thinking, and the growingly insistent demand that his thinking should not be subversive” (Lynd [1939] 1986, 7). Lynd concluded that, stuck between the demands of the well-being of a social institution – in the social scientist’s case the university – that appears to be increasingly controlled by 44
special business interests and by ideologies concerning the greater good of society, it had indeed “manifest disadvantages” for the social scientist to put “one’s head into a lion’s mouth to operate on a sore tooth” (ibid.: 8).

Put differently, the social scientist is found in a dilemma. Knowledge, morals and interests appeared to be connected. But how exactly? Lynd drew attention to the fact that the social scientist had to make sense of that web called culture of which the social scientist was also a part. According to Lynd, the twentieth century social scientist faced an even more challenging task in that this culture was driven by specialisation and marked by an extremely sophisticated division of labour. If that was true and if this also applied to academia we were unlikely to get a comprehensive answer by solely looking at one particular discipline, one specific political, social or economic problem. In contrast, Lynd conceived of an enlightened social science as one which was aware of disciplinary limitations and one that also attempted to address the common good. For Lynd the answer lay obviously not in an ever-increasing division of labour but in attempting to understand the entire society – an impossible task if you just look at its constituent parts. We must, argued Lynd, break with our specialised habits and attempt instead at being more comprehensive: “Specialization and precise meaning”, he noted, “must continue, for without them science cannot grow. But if human institutions form a continuation of sorts, all parts of which are interacting all the time, and if specialization and the refinement of measurement are not to continue to operate in effect to prompt us to ignore these vital continuities, there is need for an inclusive frame of reference for all the social sciences. Each specialist would then state his problems with reference to the inclusive totality in which they operate. This totality is nothing less than the entire culture” (ibid.: 19). Lynd, so it seems, had a very modern notion of culture. For him, culture was not a specific realm in the way we see for example art and literature but “all things that a group of people inhabiting a common geographical area… do, the way they do things and the ways they think and feel about things, their material tools and their values and symbols” (ibid). Culture, Lynd argued, was not a separate sphere on top of the political, economic or social spheres, but something that ran through all aspects of life. It is this modern notion of culture that allowed Lynd to see the wood for the trees. Contemporary advocates of public sociology would be well advised to take Lynd’s insights seriously. As it currently stands, the notion of public sociology appears to be of a rather instrumentalist kind with little or no appeal beyond the discipline. This does not make for good advertising. The attempt to reach out and distribute knowledge seems to resemble the mechanical way in which water is distributed from a water sprinkler. It makes sociology look narcissistic and as being the one discipline which knows ‘the truth’. It presupposes that sociologists have the knowledge but only lack the means or access of distributing it more widely. It makes sociology look desperate, insecure and anxious about its status. It is a discipline that seems to be apparently unaware of its cultural dimensions in the way Lynd talks about it.
It is but a small step from Robert S. Lynd to Lewis A. Coser, a sociologist and radical German-Jewish exile who had not only a good knowledge of the American and European sociological publics but whose own life was also marked by the ideological wars of the twentieth century. In a foreword to the 1986 edition of Lynd’s *Knowledge for What?* Coser noted that its author appeared as somebody who had come too early and was therefore punished with obliteration – “the penalty for taking the lead” (ibid.: xii). It should not come as a total surprise to the reader to learn that only a few years before Coser wrote the lines just quoted he himself had tried to map the relationship between intellectuals and publics. Coser’s *Men of Ideas: A Sociologist’s View* was the attempt to make sense of the plurality of contexts in which intellectuals (and sociologists) operate (Coser, 1965). While some of the conditions have obviously changed since he first formulated his ideas, many descriptions still ring true today. Coser observed for example “(un)iversities have been a haven for intellectuals over the last few centuries to the extent that they allowed them to one degree or another to stand apart from the world of everyday affairs. They protected men of ideas from the insistent pressures of the market place and the political arena” (ibid.: xvii). Coser warned also “if the boundaries that in the past separated the world of the university from the world at large are broken down, if the university can no longer provide a shield protecting its members, the life of the mind in America will be in mortal peril”. With special reference to the 1960s student movement he noted critically “a politicised university … cannot provide the environment in which intellect flowers” (both quotes ibid.: xvii). Much of Coser’s comments were indeed directed against a somewhat naïve conceptualization of the relationship that existed between intellectuals and their publics. Coser also alerted fellow sociologists to be careful about what one wishes for: naïvely calling for a new public sociology without taking specific historical and social contexts into account was, in Coser’s view, not only careless but could, on occasion, turn out to become a tunnel effect with detrimental consequences for the discipline itself.

Like Lynd, Coser came too early and as we know by now, the ‘punishment’ for this is obliteration. Today *Men of Ideas* is almost forgotten. This is regrettable because Coser was in an almost ideal position to explain to us why the American context differed from that of Europe. In the US, modern universities no longer just catered to an elite but had to attempt to educate a mass of students. With increased size came increased differentiation, leading American universities to fulfil ever more specialised functions. The academization of the intellect was a direct outcome: quite a few intellectuals who before then had operated outside the university environment were now drawn into academia. As Coser puts it, “There are few major university departments in the social sciences or the humanities in which we do not find radicals or ex-radicals who at one time attempted to make livings as unattached intellectuals in the interstices of official universities” (ibid 267). According to Coser, this shift could not only be observed in universities but also in government and the media. In such a situation not all the people dealing with ideas could be identified as fulfilling *per definitionem* the role and function
of intellectuals. The net result was that “today intellectuals may play a role within the university, they may benefit from affiliation with it, but they can no longer be the university” (ibid.: 280).

To be sure, there have been some considerable changes since Coser identified some of the major patterns in modern higher education. The need for extra legitimation vis-à-vis the taxpayer has perhaps increased, performance indicators have put on extra pressures, and impact factors now try to measure the output and reception of ideas. But overall Coser’s observation describes drifts that can still be observed today. The compartmentalization of knowledge continues. But it seems now as if modern higher education wants to have its cake and eat it as well. The deeper irony in all of this is that the call for public sociology does not appear to be that far away from what it criticizes. In terms of diagnosis it ironically resembles Veblen’s ‘captains of higher learning’. The difference is only that the captains are in power and steer the ship while the others receive the orders. If there is anything new at all, it is perhaps that the balance has clearly tipped towards more bureaucratisation and mindless pseudo-academic exercises. Control and fear have now become major driving factors. Whether a new public sociology that deserves its name can provide protection against such developments remains to be seen.

So far we have argued that some of Mill’s, Lynd’s and Coser’s structural arguments, particularly their insights as to the broader context and culture, still provide food for thought. However, evoking Mills, Lynd and Coser, we have also argued for the importance of paying attention to changing contexts. Thus, we do not believe in the return to yesterday; rather, we insist in zeroing in on the many contexts and constellations and their changing meaning.

What changes in particular do we have in mind? First and foremost we would argue one has to take into consideration some radical demographic changes. The worldwide expansion of the universities and the establishing of modern mass universities had consequences both for the professoriate and its standing within the public. The growth of the numbers of professors, students, and the related explosion of the role of scientific papers and scholarly books, has challenged the traditional understanding of the role of the professional academic. The changes happened in several parts of the world but came about in a staggered way. The expansion of the system of higher education started first in the United States, followed by the Soviet Union and its satellites and occurred in Western Europe much later. To some degree it has been spurred by the so called Sputnik Crisis, when the Soviets launched the first Earth satellite in October 1957, very much to the complete surprise of the Western world (the next time the West was caught on the wrong foot was when the Soviet empire imploded). Immediately the American government reacted with an increase in the budget for research and initiatives to expand the country’s university programs.

However, the system of channelling government money into academic research had actually started much earlier as a reaction towards the supposed superiority of a military enemy. America’s World War II involvement was accompanied by an awareness of having been surprised and accordingly the US entered
war somewhat unprepared. To avoid such a crisis ever happening again the US
government increased the federal budget for research, which was distributed mainly
via the Department of War and its branches. However, the Army, Air Force and
Navy did not only spend huge amounts on militarily relevant research. Nothing
could illustrate this better than a footnote of one of the earliest papers of that well-
known critic Noam Chomsky: In 1955 he acknowledged the support of the Army’s
Signal Corps, the Air Force’s Office of Scientific Research and Air Research and
Development Command, as well as the Navy Office of Naval Research. All of the
mentioned and the Eastman Kodak Company gave Chomsky, then affiliated with
MIT’s Department of Modern Language and the Research Laboratory of Electronics,
money for his study “Three Models for the Description of Language”. In Chomsky’s
case the funding by the “military-industrial complex”, which President Eisenhower
had warned of in his farewell address in 1961, did not silence the author. Rather
Chomsky became inclined to expose the beast that had once fed him. Others, less
convinced persons might have subordinated themselves more.

Another example of the problematic relationship between academics and 16
their publics took the form of incorporation by former freethinkers usually by 17
means of appointment or promotion, two possible pathways by which independent 18
intellectuals became university professors. From the 1950s onwards writers, who 19
had made their living earlier in their careers by contributing to some magazine or 20
journal, were hired by the newly established universities. Changing places might 21
not have led necessarily to a change in attitudes but the disappearing world of 22
the little magazines definitely closed that channel for the next generation. One 23
of the consequences was that young graduates were no longer obliged to spend 24
some time in jobs outside academia but instead continued to live inside the ivory 25
tower, if only on the ground floor. The new academic cohort did not have to go 26
any more through a stage of life where they had to reach out to a wider, less 27
academically educated audience. Instead, they could just produce texts for readers 28
like themselves.

While a new cohort went through normal academic career paths, some 30
established members of the professoriate followed a different route by starting their 31
career outside the campus, for example as experts in governmental advisory groups. 32
The new differentiation processes led to a re-definition of roles and agendas. Seen 33
from an international perspective, the changes in the higher education sector did 34
not all occur simultaneously. For example, the British university system remained 35
up to the middle of the 1960s unchanged, whereas in the US a new hierarchy of 36
colleges, universities and research universities has been established much earlier, 37
not least due to changed admission policies like the G.I. Bill.

The knowledge production inside academia became affected by what has been 39
called “scientification”. Whatever social scientists produced was now evaluated 40
according to what were assumed to be the standards of international scholarship. 41
What the public thought no longer played any important role. The natural sciences 42
increasingly influenced knowledge production, at times parodying the physical 43
sciences to a point of utter absurdity. Carving out big theories lost its appeal and 44
testing clear-cut hypotheses became standard. Increasing competition between 1 scholars was accompanied by new funding regimes that generally encouraged 2 short-term deliveries of results. Both led to the slicing of the findings into the 3 smallest publishable units, submitted to a growing number of highly specialised 4 scholarly journals. An assault on the learned book was the inevitable result. 5

In the US, McCarthyism, the hysterical prosecution and expulsion of purported 6 communists caused a climate of apprehension, where professors worried about 7 exposing students to ‘critical’ texts. In Europe, perhaps even more so than in 8 the US, the Cold War reached a peak when the Congress for Cultural Freedom 9 organized public events in which disillusioned ex-communists fought Stalinist 10 expansionism. The irony of it all was that Arthur Koestler and his compatriots 11 did not get much support from university professors who preferred to remain 12 apolitical. Actually, the deployment of atomic bombs at the end of World War II 13 in Hiroshima and Nagasaki mobilized many more physicists and other scientists. 14 In contrast, only a handful of social scientists joined the so-called Pugwash 15 movement, named after a gathering in a small Canadian village, in the aftermath 16 of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto (1955), which called upon scientists to assess 17 the dangers of weapons of mass destruction.

During the 1950s and early 1960s European intellectuals either sided with the 18 Communist Parties or the Congress for Cultural Freedom; in-between the space 19 narrowed. In particular French and Italian intellectuals seemed to have been 20 affected by this civil-war like positioning. Perhaps Raymond Aron’s L’opium des intellectuels has been the most outstanding contribution from a sociological viewpoint. The other academics who were unwilling to join the heated debate 24 secured a niche, usually by turning into experts for applied social problems. Their 25 special competence ranged from the sexual behaviour – Alfred Kinsley comes to 26 mind here – to the supposed devastating consequences of the new mass media, 27 associated with the name of Paul Lazarsfeld and his team. Whereas Kinsey filled 28 football stadiums and appeared on the cover of Time, researchers of the Lazarsfeld 29 type catered to media networks, the government or local administrations by 30 providing project reports about whatever else clients were asking for.

By way of the cunning reason of history both Kinsey’s and Lazarsfeld’s 32 approaches came to symbolize what would eventually be called “the average 33 American”. It seemed as if proclaiming a distribution of particular sexual practices 34 affected ordinary people the same way as the announcement of voting preferences 35 before an election. Many years before, at the beginning of the twentieth century 36 Georg Jellineck, a legal scholar from Germany, had coined the formula of the 37 “normative power of the factual”. Jellineck thought about it in the context of 38 law and its effects. However, from the 1950s onwards the normative force of the 39 factual increasingly applied to other realms, like the sexual behaviour or media 40 consumption patterns. Visions of the good life became eclipsed by reports on the 41 distribution of habits, preferences, etc. As a consequence the space for critical 42 commentary shrank. Theodor W. Adorno lamented this new conformist mood by 43
proclaiming that “there could be no good life in one that is false”, a statement which became a slogan for the emerging youth and student movement. The Sixties saw a huge number of sociologists entering academia, perhaps more so in Europe than in America. In the US the expansion of the higher education sector had started much earlier and had almost come to an end when the cohorts of the disobedient generation entered professional life. The contrast manifested itself throughout academia and the distinct development of sociology was no exception to this rule. The segregation and isolation of academia was less pronounced in Europe. In the old Continent sociologists got much more attention outside the universities than in the US. Ralf Dahrendorf, Jürgen Habermas, Raymond Aron, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens, to name just a few, became public intellectuals whereas very few American sociologist managed to reach a wider public. Especially from the 1970s onwards Europe produced more influential thinkers with a sociology background than their counterparts across the Atlantic. A part of American sociology’s current unhappiness seems to be rooted in the noticeable decline of public figures in the discipline. Our suspicion is that some of the broader resonance of European public intellectuals can be explained by access to various media. The European intellectual uses public appearances in newspapers, radio broadcasts and TV talk shows, but remains, despite all this, primarily a writer. This has changed only in recent years. Today members of the chattering class seldom come from an academic background. Authors like Stéphane Hessel with his Indignez-vous appeal have come to occupy the public spaces formerly populated by authors of an academic background. The irony seems to be that some international convergence seems to have taken place because the same observation could be made with regard to the American Occupy Wall Street movement.

The purpose of this volume is to do what sociologists do best: not drawing up imaginary publics but analysing those publics and concrete contexts and specific meanings that do exist and that are of relevance to our work. We need to know more about the discipline but from a perspective of a public sociology that has no ‘imperialist’ notions or tendencies and that avoids the pitfalls discussed above. We need to get a more rounded picture of how sociological ideas and publics work in different contexts around the world. Of course, this volume cannot cover all aspects, nor can it analyse what is going on in all parts of the world. What it can do, however, is to look at a few examples that highlight some of the tensions and contradictions discussed above. Our title evokes Lynd’s discussion of the usefulness of knowledge. However, we give it a slightly different direction by asking Knowledge for Whom? instead of Knowledge for What? The qualification in the subtitle Public Sociology in the Making makes clear that we have no quarrel with a new project that favours more productive encounters between academics, ideas and various publics. However, in contrast to Burawoy and other advocates of public sociology we hypothesise that it might be helpful to employ the tools of the sociology of ideas in a wider and deeper sense. We would like to understand public sociology as a delicate undertaking and achievement, full of the contradictions and tensions that Lynd and Coser alerted
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1 us to. More specifically, we are guided by three major questions: (1) How does one become a public sociologist and prominent intellectual in the first place, and can one think about prominent examples and eminent scholars, perhaps by going beyond the traditional sociology of knowledge approach? (2) How complex and complicated do the stories of institutions and professional associations become when they take on a public role or tackle a major social or political problem? (3) How can one investigate the relationship between individual sociologists and intellectuals and their various publics without falling into the traps of uni-linear narratives like that of Burawoy?

Accordingly our book is divided up into three parts. In the first part, “Public Intellectuals and their Afterlives: Biographies, Reputation Building and Academic Disciplines”, Marcel Fournier addresses the question of how difficult is it to write a biography in social sciences by discussing the cases of Durkheim and Mauss. Having written the biographies of both, Fournier was faced with a number of difficulties, which he discusses in greater detail in this chapter: the marginal status of biography in the field of social sciences, the relation between the study of a life and the study of a work, and the theoretical perspective which often supports descriptive presentation of life and work of the authors in question. Fournier also asks whether there is something that can be said about the relative roles the private and the public play in the life of a scholar? What exactly is a work (œuvre) in the social sciences? Are we looking at coherence from beginning to end or should we stress oppositions or contradictions?

Andreas Hess elaborates on the argument about biography and looks at the new sociology of ideas which is trying to distance itself from other attempts that have tried to address the complex relationship between ideas and individual life stories. But how successful is this new approach, both in theory and in practice, when compared to the more traditional sociology of knowledge and the intellectual history approach? Hess argues that the sociology of knowledge, intellectual history and the new sociology of ideas have all tried to find answers to the challenge of finding a plausible way through the complex constellation of social environment, the making of ideas and that intellectual ‘surplus’ that is generated through individual life trajectories. Yet, despite all theoretical sophistication, these attempts have remained somewhat incomplete. This incompleteness, he concludes, is not due to the lack of theoretical awareness or sophistication but can be explained by looking at the complex ways in which individual creativity plays out under often challenging social conditions.

Daniel R. Huebner investigates scholarly publishing projects in the Great Depression, projects which he treats as cases of the economic structuring of knowledge. Huebner has some doubts about previous research results, which documented the impact of economic downturns on scholarly publication, most often by demonstrating the overall decline in books and journals sold and produced during such periods. While such research highlights the large amount of competent scholarship that goes unpublished in times of economic hardship, it had little to say about what impact, if any, downturns have on the content of the works that do...
manage to get published under such circumstances. In order to assess whether this
claim is actually true, he selects as case studies two series of proposed monographs
that were under consideration at American scholarly publishing houses during
the Great Depression, the so-called “Payne Fund” studies at Macmillan, and the
“Works of George H. Mead” at the University of Chicago Press. Huebner finds
that in both cases the order of publication of the series volumes was determined
in part by estimates of sales potential and that there was pressure to reduce and
reformulate the text of the volumes in order to ensure publication and sales. These
decisions, made under especially pressing conditions, affected the subsequent use
made of the volumes. In particular, the order and content of the Payne Fund studies
had a decisive impact on film censorship debates in the United States and helped
popularize social attitude survey methods. Equally, the order and content of the
Mead works popularized a particular understanding of his thinking that became
influential in the social sciences.

Marcia Consolim looks at developments in France but does so as a Brazilian sociologist who is interested in the history of European sociology and particularly French sociology. Her chapter aims at contributing to a better understanding of standpoints taken by the Revue Internationale de Sociologie in the first 20 years of its existence (1893–1912). The journal aimed both at disseminating the social sciences and legitimizing a certain view of these subjects and their relationship with sociology. Consolim shows that the journal’s principal contributors and editors belonged to two identifiable groups: law and economics on one side and pedagogy and teacher training for secondary schools on the other. Despite the official rhetoric which supported sociology, in practice the emerging discipline and some of its exponents were regarded with suspicion. More specifically, Consolim argues that the struggle between collective psychology and sociology for hegemony explains much of the standpoints the Revue took. Despite the ‘organic’ defense of sociology, the work of Gabriel Tarde was used to position the journal against Émile Durkheim and his journal L’Année Sociologique.

Jarosław Kilias discusses Czech and Polish narratives and what they tell us about the construction of sociology’s past. Kilias points out that the texts that he discusses were actually not written by historians but by sociological theorists without any historical training, and, in one case, a renowned historian of ideas. However, this apparently did not influence the validity of the argument in any significant way. More surprising is perhaps that the narrative structure of all four books under consideration was rather loose; none of them exhibits narrative patterns typical for historical narratives. According to Kilias, such a development can be explained not only by the growing time distance from the described phenomena, but also by the formation of classical sociology as an autonomous sub-discipline of sociological theory.

The second part of our book deals with the question that any public sociology faces, “Serving the Public or the State?” This section of the book opens with Daniel Gordon who takes a closer look at some of the fundamental tensions that have emerged in universities, especially in the United States since 1945. While recognizing the
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often discussed dilemmas of teaching versus research and general education versus specialized education, he focuses on the contradiction between discipline formation on the one hand, and a democratic service ethos that tends to morph over time into consumerism on the other. Gordon offers us some critical thoughts on how the trends described in his piece impact on the discipline of sociology.

With Barbara Hoenig’s chapter our attention moves to Europe. While recent global changes in higher education and research evoke differences due to peculiar processes of institutionalization in the different nation-states and a variety of disciplines, not much research has been conducted on its impact in the European context and on sociology as a discipline in particular. Hoenig’s concerns are with both the supra-national institutional framework of European science policy and the impact it has on a re-definition of the so-called European Research Area (ERA).

Hoenig argues that it is highly likely that we will be faced with new inequalities and processes of monopolization in the European research system.

Sally Shortall argues that in order to understand how evidence is used to inform policy, we must critically reflect on the organizational culture of the civil service and how it differs from the academy. She examines the hierarchical rule-based structure of the civil service, where authority is linked to office. Shortall considers the role of the civil servant as a generalist, who does not have specialist knowledge of his or her policy area, but instead has specialist knowledge of the workings of the civil service and how to minimize uncertainty. Shortall also examines the culture of anonymity in the civil service. Academics who provide evidence to civil servants may have little knowledge of the structure of the civil service or how it differs from their culture. The academic is a specialist whose academic authority comes from questioning normative knowledge and publicly disputing accepted beliefs. Such an approach is anathema to the civil service. She concludes that the difference in values and ideology of the civil service and the academy has implications for how academic research is used to formulate policy and how it positions itself in knowledge power struggles.

From Europe we move to South-East Asia: Albert Tzeng takes a closer look at the emergence and state of the public sociology debate in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore where the idea of ‘Public Sociology’ has attracted extensive theoretical debates. However, very few empirical surveys exist that look at the actual practices in these countries in a more systematic way. Starting from a critical revision of Burawoy’s scheme, Tzeng develops an elaborated template which allows him to look at the targeted audience, epistemological style and the level of engagement. Based on his empirical material Tzeng offers some critical reflections regarding the notions of critical mass, intellectual traditions and political-institutional factors.

From South East Asia we make a big jump across the Pacific Ocean to Latin America. Márcio de Oliveira looks at a chapter in Brazilian sociological history that might not be known outside of Brazil: the UNESCO research about racial relations and the unexpected racism against Poles in Curitiba (Paraná). As Oliveira points out, the history of Brazilian sociology has been very influenced by UNESCO’s fight against racism just after the Second World War. In Brazil
this fight culminated in a research program about racial relations, which took place between 1951 and 1952 in the cities of Recife, Salvador, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. UNESCO saw Brazil as a country that had a successful model of harmonic racial relations. In this sense, it would be a paradigm for other racial conflictive countries all around the world. Nevertheless, Brazilian history and society disappointed UNESCO’s officials because the Brazilian research team had discovered that the model of democratic racial relations – as described by the most famous Brazilian anthropologist, Gilberto Freyre (1900–1987) – was widely overrated. So, after the initial UNESCO research, a new Brazilian team – headed by the most important sociologist of this period, Florestan Fernandes (1920–1995) – engaged in new research about racial relations in Southern Brazil. This area was left out of the first UNESCO research apparently because of the small number, or even total lack of, black people. As it turned out, in the city of Curitiba (capital of the state of Paraná) they were surprised by discovering a new type of racism: racism against white people, particularly those of Polish descent. Oliveira intends to recover the details of this unexpected discovery by taking a closer look at a number of neglected dimensions and by putting the case in the proper context of Brazilian sociological history.

The third part of the book discusses “Individual intellectuals and their audiences”. The first case study by Matteo Bortolini deals with the US sociologist Robert Bellah. Bellah started off in the mid-1950s as a specialist on Japanese religion and a general theorist in the sociology of religion, working squarely within the twin frameworks of structural-functionalism and modernization theory. Around 1965, however, he abandoned Parsonian jargon and championed a radical approach to the study of religion, which he termed ‘symbolic realism’. Describing his new stance as a politics of imagination and religion, Bellah wrote that the best guides might not be systematic theorists, but poets and ecstatic aphorists. In the autobiographical introduction to his first collection of essays, Beyond Belief (1970), Bellah explained his intellectual shift as the result of a personal coupure, born out of disillusionment with American political and cultural life and the influence of a counter-culture. Bortolini intends to complement Bellah’s autobiographical explanation by showing that the structural and intellectual roots of ‘symbolic realism’ and its meaning lie also within a disciplinary and interdisciplinary context.

Studying open-editorial pages in two Austrian dailies, Philipp Korom attempts to determine who exactly it is who is doing the talking, who the public is and what motives of each are when it comes to the relations between the two. Korom identifies the authors and their professional roles but he is also interested in establishing a debate about the deeper political, cultural and social meaning of this public deliberation process. Ragnvald Kalleberg takes a closer look at the roles of academics and the media. Usually dissemination has the function of making specialized knowledge and insight relevant for and understandable to an interested public outside a particular research area. However, on occasion academics also take part in public discourse and contribute with specialized knowledge to democratic discourse. How exactly
is this task understood and practiced nowadays? Is it adequately institutionalized? What are its problems and prospects? Kalleberg focuses particularly on Norwegian academics and uses them as a case study in order to illustrate a more general phenomenon in modern media-dominated contemporary society.

Jonathan Roberge and Thomas Crosbie discuss the changing role of the intellectual as critic and what distinguishes old forms from new forms of intervention in the public sphere. They argue that many discourse communities gather around the thoughts and actions of social movement intellectuals, that is, individuals who are closely identified with the meaning of the community as a whole. However, new media technology has changed the communicative interaction patterns of many of these groups. Social movements have become balkanized and ever-smaller grained communities are the result of this. Skilled critics have taken the place of social movement intellectuals by defining the internal meanings of the group as well as projecting those meanings onto a broader public.

Andrew Abbott’s text is an attempt to take stock. What does it mean for a social scientist to reason and to be passionate about the society he or she is a part of? That this is not just something that only American sociologists think about becomes clear once we expand our horizons and take a closer look at how other cultures and societies function and how their respective social scientists have tried to explain them. The University of Atlantis and the work of Barbara Celarent provide an excellent viewpoint to look at this aspect of world sociology in an imaginative fashion.

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