

Knowledge for whom? A critical note on the uses and abuses of 'Public Sociology'¹

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Introduction

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 don't, 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 don't even seem to be able to recognise themselves in fictional figures as they appear for example in David Lodge's and Malcom Bradbury's novels. Are we that humourless? Don't we 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 (ASA), 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 very same meeting, had made even more headlines than Cardoso's visit had, at least in sociological circles. 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 hasn't 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).²

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 to either directly or indirectly. To be fair, most participants were aware of this limitation; yet, the remarkable thing was that they decided not 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-provincialise 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.³

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 problem⁴ – this suggestion was, we suggest somewhat surprisingly, 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 the world, maybe less so!⁵

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 underdeveloped, or better, overdeveloped role crystallisation 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' (Goffman 1974: 14). It is obvious that such a detached attitude is miles away from the *weltanschauung* of the engaged sociologists of the present.

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, also 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 decolonisation 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 doesn't bode well for any future debate about sociology and its publics.⁶

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 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 of 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 on to something. Much earlier, actually almost twenty-three years before Mills's 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* (Lynd 1967 [1939]). Its author addressed the complications and potential risks that a publicly 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 1967 [1939]: 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 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' (Lynd 1967 [1939]: 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.⁷ 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 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' (Lynd 1986 [1939]: 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' (Lynd 1986 [1939]). Culture, Lynd argued, was not a separate sphere on top of the political, economical 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 doesn't 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 a 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' (Lynd 1986 [1939]: 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 '(u)niversities 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' (Coser 1965: 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' (Coser 1965: xvii). Much of Coser's comments were indeed directed against a somewhat naïve conceptualisation of the relationship that existed between intellectuals and their publics. Coser also alerted fellow sociologists to be careful about what one wishes for: naively calling for a new public sociology without taking specific historical and social contexts into account was in Coser's eyes 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 academisation 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' (Coser 1965: 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 by definition 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' (Coser 1965: 280).

Certainly 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 compartmentalisation 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 doesn't appear to be that far away from what it criticises. 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 Mills'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 their first Earth satellite in October 1957, very much to the complete surprise of the Western world (the next time that the West was caught on the wrong foot was when the Soviet empire imploded). Immediately the American government reacted with an increase of the budget for research and initiatives to expand the country's university programmes.

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 Second World War involvement was accompanied by an awareness of having been surprised and accordingly the US entered the war somewhat unprepared. To avoid such a crisis from 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 spent huge amounts on militarily relevant research. Nothing could illustrate this better than a footnote in 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' (Chomsky 1956). 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 their publics took the form of incorporation by former freethinkers usually by means of appointment or promotion, two possible pathways by which independent intellectuals became university professors. From the 1950s onwards writers, who had made their living earlier in their careers by contributing to some magazine or journal, were hired by the newly established universities. Changing places might not have led necessarily to a change in attitude but the disappearing world of the little magazines definitely closed that channel for the next generation. One of the consequences was that young graduates were no longer obliged to spend some time in jobs outside academia but instead continued to live inside the ivory tower, if only on the ground floor. The new academic cohort did not have to go any more through a stage of life where they had to reach out to a wider, less academically educated audience. Instead, they could just produce texts for readers like themselves.

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

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

In the US, McCarthyism, the hysterical prosecution and expulsion of purported communists caused a climate of apprehension, where professors worried about exposing students to 'critical' texts (Lazarsfeld and Thielens 1977 [1958]). In Europe, perhaps even more so than in the US, the Cold War reached a peak when the Congress for Cultural Freedom organised public events in which disillusioned ex-communists fought Stalinist expansionism. The irony of it all was that Arthur Koestler and his compatriots did not get much support

from university professors who preferred to remain apolitical. Actually, the deployment of atomic bombs at the end of the Second World War in Hiroshima and Nagasaki mobilised many more physicists and other scientists. In contrast, only a handful of social scientists joined the so-called Pugwash movement, named after a gathering in a small Canadian village, in the aftermath of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto (1955), which called upon scientists to assess the dangers of weapons of mass destruction.

During the 1950s and early 1960s European intellectuals either sided with the Communist Parties or the Congress for Cultural Freedom; in between the space narrowed. In particular French and Italian intellectuals seemed to have been 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 (Aron 1957 [1955]). The other academics who were unwilling to join the heated debate secured a niche, usually by turning into experts for applied social problems. Their special competence ranged from the sexual behaviour – Alfred Kinsey comes to mind here – to the supposed devastating consequences of the new mass media, associated with the name of Paul Lazarsfeld and his team. Whereas Kinsey filled football stadiums and appeared on the cover of *Time*, researchers of the Lazarsfeld type catered to media networks, the government or local administrations by providing project reports about whatever else clients were asking for (Igo 2007).⁸

By the way of the cunning reason of history both Kinsey's and Lazarsfeld's approaches came to symbolise what would eventually be called 'the averaged American' (Igo 2007). It seemed as if proclaiming a distribution of particular sexual practices affected ordinary people in the same way as the announcement of voting preferences before an election. Many years before, at the beginning of the twentieth century Georg Jellinek, a legal scholar from Germany, had coined the formula of the 'normative power of the factual'. Jellinek thought about it in the context of law and its effects. However, from the 1950s onwards the normative fact of the factual increasingly applied to other realms, like the sexual behaviour or media consumption patterns (Popitz 1980). Visions of the good life became eclipsed by reports on the distribution of habits, preferences, etc. As a consequence the space for critical commentary shrank. Theodor W. Adorno lamented this new conformist mood by 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 (Adorno 1994 [1950]).

The 1960s 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 (Sica and Turner 2005). The contrast manifested itself in 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 sociologists 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.⁹ 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. Today, authors like Stéphane Hessel with his *Indignez-vous* appeal (2011) 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 article consisted in stressing 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.

Notes

- 1 This article is an edited and truncated version of a longer foreword to Fleck and Hess (2014).
- 2 Alain Touraine, who is French, and Burawoy himself, who is British but teaches mainly in America, were the only two non-Americans contributing to the book. We should add here that the question of public sociology was followed up in 2009 by a special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 34(3), edited by Neil McLaughlin.
- 3 See the contributions by Judith Stacey, Orlando Patterson and Andrew Abbott in Clawson (2007). That is 3 out of 17 contributions.
- 4 This is indeed a positive reading of Burawoy's presidential ASA address. As the new ISA President he has travelled around the world, addressing numerous audiences, yet with surprisingly little effort to change the tune and leaving the main 'American' argument still unrefined.
- 5 This unreconstructed attitude seems to confirm Michael D. Kennedy's and Miguel A. Centeno's assessment of American sociology in their article 'Internationalism and global transformations in American sociology', in Calhoun (2007).

- 6 The obliteration of most of the discipline's history is even more remarkable after the celebration of the ASA's centenary in 2007, including the publication of a doorstopper volume, *Sociology in America: A History* (Calhoun 2007).
- 7 It was actually Clifford Geertz who used the allegory of the net first. See Geertz's essay collection *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) and particularly the first essay 'Thick Description'.
- 8 The Records of the Bureau of Applied Research of Columbia University offer rich data on this, see: http://findingaids.cul.columbia.edu/ead/nnc-rb/ldpd_5012632/summary#scope_content, accessed 20 December 2012.
- 9 Compare Outhwaite (2009) and Jacobs and Townsley (2011).

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