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# *Why Sociology Does Not Need to Be Saved: Analytic Reflections on Public Sociologies\**

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After reviewing the debate about public sociologies in the American Sociological Association over the past few years, we offer a response to calls for “saving sociology” from the Burawoy approach as well as an analytic critique of the former ASA president’s “For Public Sociology” address. While being sympathetic to the basic idea of public sociologies, we argue that the “reflexive” and “critical” categories of sociology, as Burawoy has conceptualized them, are too ambiguous and value-laden to allow for empirical investigation of the different major orientations of sociological research and the ways the discipline can address non-academic audiences. Debates about the future of sociology should be undertaken with empirical evidence, and we need a theoretical approach that can allow us to compare both disciplines and nations as well as taking into account the institutional context of the universities in which we operate. Research into the conditions under which professional, critical, policy, and public sociologies could work together for the larger disciplinary and societal good is called for instead of overheated rhetoric both for and against public sociologies.

The emergence of “public sociologies” as a conference theme, an intellectual movement and vision for the discipline is one of the most exciting, productive, and important events in the recent history of sociology. The American Sociological Association conference “Public Sociologies” in 2004 organized in San Francisco was interesting, extremely well attended, and has injected renewed energy into the discipline. We have been discussing the issue in Canada, as well<sup>1</sup> appropriately so, since Burawoy’s (2005b) original notion of “provincializing American sociology” suggests a truly global vision for sociology. Certainly the exciting international presence at the annual meetings in San Francisco bodes well for the future.

This movement towards public sociologies, however, is not uncontroversial. In addition to numerous dialogues and debates about the trend, there has also emerged

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a countermovement to “save” sociology as a science from public sociology. After outlining the contours of the debate so far among both mainstream and radical sociologists, this essay will argue that sociology most certainly does not need to be “saved” from public sociologies. We will pay particular attention to the perspective of Mathieu Deflem, probably the most vocal critic of public sociologies with his web site “Save Sociology” (Deflem, 2004a). There is a danger, we will argue, that Deflem’s perspective could help to destroy sociology in order to “save it,” if we can be excused for using this Vietnam era metaphor. While he makes some important points, the tone of the “save sociology” perspective is problematic and divisive. Moreover, his vision of a purely “scientific sociology” undermines the intellectual and moral energy of the discipline in a time of complex institutional transformations within modern universities.

There is something, however, to be discussed in the issues Deflem raises. The argument outlined in Michael Burawoy’s (2005a) “For Public Sociology” requires analytic unpacking. Burawoy’s public sociology argument in his 2004 Presidential address to the ASA made for a terrific speech, and has helped lay the foundation for a revitalized sociology for the twenty-first century. But his model of the different forms of practicing sociology works better as a political program and diplomatic compromise within the profession than as an outline for an empirically grounded understanding of sociology and other organized forms of knowledge production today. The contradiction between public sociologies as an inspiring agenda for action on the one hand; and an analysis of the trade-offs, institutional dynamics, and comparative dimensions of public intellectuals, popular intellectuals, and academic professions on the other, leaves the space for an ultimately counterproductive movement to “save” sociology. Debates about the future of the discipline can be undertaken in a more productive way if the issues raised by public sociologies are translated into researchable questions. This argument will be laid out as we proceed towards offering an alternative way of thinking about the issues.

This essay is organized in three sections. First, we will outline the basic critique of public sociologies developed by mainstream and radical sociologists, with a particular focus on the perspective developed in the “save sociology” website. What is the basic case against public sociologies, and does it hold up to scrutiny? Our view, as we have suggested above, is that this “save sociology” perspective is misleading. Nonetheless there are, in fact, contradictions with the model Burawoy has developed. We will discuss the problem with the use of the notion of reflexivity in Burawoy’s model, the ambiguities of what he means by “critical sociology,” and the need to develop a model that will work for both comparative research on various national sociologies, as well as for thinking about different disciplines. Finally, we will present some tentative ideas about how to move forward towards an alternative perspective for studying public sociologies, something we will present in more developed form elsewhere. This analytic perspective, we believe, can help us talk about the future of our discipline in comparative context beyond the case of the United States and the blinders of our own disciplinary perspective.

### *Does Sociology Need to Be Saved?*

Academic respectability in the modern research university, we know, comes from reputational autonomy that flows from technical language, clear boundaries be-

tween science and non-science and the restriction of audience to academic peers not the general lay public (Whitely, 1984; Fuchs, 2000). At least that is the conventional wisdom. Sociology as an academic discipline is a relative newcomer to the research university, and has fought a long battle distinguishing itself from the academically low status social work, social reform, religious advocacy, and socialist movements it emerged from, on the one hand, and the more established natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences on the other (Turner and Turner, 1990; Halliday, 1992). As a result, the discipline’s history could be read as a debate between the reformers, activists, and utopian visionaries (of both the left and the right) on the one hand, and the professionalizing proponents of a scientific sociology and an autonomous academic discourse on the other.

Michael Burawoy’s (2005a) presidential address “For Public Sociology” is such an important and inspiring break from the past, *precisely* because he attempted to break out of these old debates. He offered us not the same old internal battle between radical and mainstream sociology, but a new framework that sees professional sociology and policy sociology in a complimentary, not antagonistic, dialogue with the critical sociology promoted by the likes of C. Wright Mills (1959), Alvin Gouldner (1970) and Dorothy Smith (1991; 1995). In Burawoy’s vision, critical sociologists and the professional establishment can come together in this period of sociology’s history, in order to move forward as a discipline and prosper with a workable division of labour. Moreover, we have now, entered a new era of public sociologies, at least in the United States, as Burawoy tells the story (Burawoy 2004a; 2004b; 2004c; 2004d; 2005a; 2005c).

The basic vision is compelling. First-rate academic knowledge about society can be produced by professional sociologists armed with our best theories and methods in the context of well-developed and competing research traditions. Policy sociologists can take this knowledge and sell it to clients in governments, non-profits and the corporate sector thus legitimating our disciplinary project to powerful and resource rich sponsors by helping solve specific social problems with reliable quality research. Critical sociologists can argue about the ethical foundations of our practise, raising the big questions regarding “knowledge for what,” “knowledge for whom,” and issues around the normative relationships between sociol-

**Figure 1**

**The Division of Sociological Labor (adapted from Burawoy 2005a)**

|                        | Academic Audience | Extra-Academic Audience |
|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Instrumental Knowledge | PROFESSIONAL      | POLICY                  |
| Reflexive Knowledge    | CRITICAL          | PUBLIC                  |

ogy, the university, and civil society. This critical debate can help us find the right balance between various competing methods, theories, and research traditions with a reflexive eye towards substance. The moral energy that critical sociology mobilizes helps recruit talented and energetic young people to our craft inspired by the moral and intellectual possibilities of the sociological imagination. At this stage of our professional development, Burawoy persuasively argues, we are ready to build a productive and peaceful compromise between these various elements of our discipline, putting aside old debates between professional, policy, and critical perspectives. We then can bring sociology's unique defense of "civil society" to political and public debate outside of purely professional and policy circles, in a new era of public sociologies.

Sociology has a unique historical role to play in the contemporary political and intellectual climate, according to Burawoy. The natural sciences are too purely instrumental to help us address important social issues, beholden as they are to powerful institutional forces and interests. Of our major competition in the social sciences, political science is too wedded to the state, and modern economics all too often serves as an apologist for the market.<sup>2</sup> Only sociology, among the human sciences, can combine theoretical and empirical research with a commitment to the human dimensions of modern society, as they play out in communities, social movements, families, voluntary organizations and face-to-face interaction. Heady and inspiring stuff as anyone who witnessed Burawoy's ASA presidential speech can attest. What is the catch?

### **Responses to Burawoy's Vision for the Discipline**

#### *Mainstream Critique: Keeping It Professional*

Not everyone who has heard Burawoy's call for a greater legitimation of public sociology is fully persuaded by it. One stream of critical response to his vision concerns the trade-offs between academic scholarship and public activism. In this perspective, sociology's precarious place in the research university could suffer from too close an association with left activism. We have struggled long and hard to be considered social science, not socialism or social work, and many sociologists worry about losing professional legitimacy, resources and public support. An additional concern is that the reformist zeal of our activism could hide arrogance in public sociology, if it assumes that the left-liberal values that most sociologists hold are superior to the views of others (Tittle, 2004). Attempts to make sociology matter assumes, it can be argued, that sociologists get to decide the moral vantage point too quickly on our own without the need for dialogue with those with different viewpoints (Fuchs, 2002). Others simply want to stress the importance of disinterested scholarly inquiry and education against the applied and activist directions in which public sociologies would take us (Wolfe, 1989; 1998; 2003; Brady, 2004; Burawoy 2004a; Neilsen, 2004; Tittle, 2004).

To some extent, Burawoy's writings and speeches already answer these concerns. Both professional *and* policy sociology, in his view, must be strong and supported in the profession, even as we develop a new focus on public sociologies alongside critical sociology. This compromise allows us to maintain our scholarly integrity by isolating our profession somewhat from the non-academic values of

powerful supporters of policy research and passionate social movement activists alike, while preventing the insularity that is the pathology of professional social science. Nonetheless, Burawoy's mainstream critics remain leery of efforts to further cultivate and promote society's public side, evidently skeptical that this balance would be easily achieved.

An additional criticism of Burawoy's typology concerns the dichotomy he draws between the policy and public branches of the discipline (Brady, 2004; Tittle, 2004). This pertains more to empirical sociology that, to use Burawoy's terminology, is geared to "thick" publics (such as community groups), than to other ways sociologists may address non-academic publics (for example by addressing "thin" publics on some issue through the mass media). The policy-public distinction is problematic in maintaining that as researchers, only public sociologists have intellectual autonomy from particularistic interests, whereas the policy-oriented sociologist contracted by the state or some other client is "a servant of power" and is constrained by their "limited concerns." Just because a public sociologist doing research to help a community group does so voluntarily rather than for pay does not mean she faces less pressure than policy sociologists to ignore or suppress findings that do not advance certain goals. The less friendly of Burawoy's critics even argue that this kind of interference with scientific rigor is inevitable with public sociology and is one of its gravest defects (Tittle, 2004).

### *Radical Critique: Fine-Tuning and Globalizing Public Sociologies*

A different set of concerns arises from left-leaning scholars who fully share Burawoy's passion for public sociology, yet criticize his sketch of how it complements and integrates with the other major types of disciplinary practice. Less concerned than mainstream critics with addressing questions of the institutional health of the discipline as a whole, these sympathetic recipients of Burawoy's ideas nonetheless raise important points. For example, Burawoy sees professional and public sociologies as making markedly different contributions to the discipline. At the same time, he regards the former as the *sine qua non* of all other types of sociology for its provision of "legitimacy and expertise" (Burawoy, 2005a: 10). The implication of this is that publicly engaged sociology does not build theory or generate questions that can be taken on by professional sociologists. The flaw in this division of labour, critics from the left point out (Acker, 2005; Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2005), is the notion that only professionally oriented, disengaged research is conducted with rigor and is capable of yielding methodological and theoretical innovation, while publicly oriented sociologists merely apply this knowledge to the questions and problems of movement activists and other lay communities. To put it another way, the objection here is to Burawoy's notion that a purely professional sociology should lead the other branches. The problem with the "professional leads the way" approach is that it can miss opportunities where public sociological work can lead to first rate scholarly work as well as political interventions (Light, 2005; Gamson, 2004; Burawoy et al., 2004). Few better examples of this can be found than the decades of politically inspired *and* scholarly influential contributions of Frances Fox Piven, the president-elect of the ASA.

Supporters of Burawoy's overall project also criticize specific aspects of the role he envisions for public sociology. Burawoy's advocacy of support for civil society

as the *raison d'être* of public sociology needs a heavy dose of caution; in the U.S. case in particular, it is dangerous to romanticize civil society that is plagued by patriarchy, xenophobia, and numerous entrenched inequalities (Brady, 2004; Acker, 2005). Furthermore, in light of the intolerance and political apathy in the United States, some feel that Burawoy is overly optimistic regarding public receptiveness to the work of progressive minded sociologists (Brady, 2004). Acker (2005) also suggests the danger of condescension in Burawoy's view of public sociology's mandate, which could be (mis)understood as trying to solve problems for oppressed or aggrieved groups instead of accompanying them in their own efforts to understand and change their situations. This point is sure to resonate with feminist and other practitioners of participatory action research. Burawoy also needs to pay more attention to civil society's transnationalizing tendencies in recent years, as illustrated by the anti-globalization movement (Urry, 2005). For public sociology, particularly in the United States, presumably this would entail overcoming the tendency to rely on theoretical perspectives derived largely or solely from the national setting.

Burawoy's friendly left critics also argue that his defense of a disciplinary consolidation for sociology misses the radical implications of interdisciplinary perspectives and visions (Acker, 2005; Aronowitz, 2005; Baiocchi, 2005; Braithwaite 2005; Brewer, 2005; Calhoun 2005; Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2005; Katz-Fishman and Scott, 2005; Urry, 2005). For example, to insist that sociology's focus is civil society, whereas the market is strictly the purview of economics, may reinforce the erroneous patriarchal idea of separate public and private spheres, perpetuating the invisibility of women's contribution to the economy through their reproductive labour (Acker, 2005). Others worry about elitism in public sociology, and in the discipline more generally (Bute, 2005). Still others are concerned about possible unintended conservative consequences of public intervention (Stacey, 2004).

### *Professional Backlash: Saving Sociology from a Marxist Conspiracy*

For the most part, the dialogue between proponents and skeptics of public sociology has been productive. The intellectual tone of the debate is disrupted, however, by the emerging "save sociology" critique. This sharper, more rancorous response to Burawoy's entreaty to further legitimize and institutionalize public sociology is led, it seems, by Mathieu Deflem, and seeks to expose public sociology as purely politically motivated and as a threat to the essence of our discipline.

Though Deflem's thoughts on public sociology, as presented in the "save sociology" website, are fragmented and brief, several basic objections to its place in the discipline can be discerned. Deflem's concerns overlap to some extent with those of the mainstream critics of Burawoy's project. Like Tittle (2004), for example, he would restrict the role of the discipline to generating accurate knowledge about the social world. Sociologists should not "set the agenda for their work" out of the issues important to counter-hegemonic audiences (Deflem, 2004b: para 6). In aiming to change and challenge society, public sociology abandons the value neutrality that is the hallmark of science. Its moral stance also trespasses on the domain of other disciplines like philosophy, Deflem argues. But he goes further than the mainstream critics by alleging that the term public sociology is merely a ruse for bringing leftist activism into the university and giving it institutional legitimacy. "The true face of public sociology is Marx," he asserts (Deflem, 2004c: para 7).

Deflem believes that public sociology has already done serious damage to the discipline. One of its effects, he argues, has been to squelch debate and erode plurality of viewpoints among sociologists, particularly within the ASA. To illustrate this he refers to the process by which the ASA under Burawoy's presidency passed a resolution condemning the U.S. occupation of Iraq in 2004, a topic on which sociological knowledge, he argues, offers no relevant insight. So tyrannical was the force of public sociology within this process, that according to Deflem, that it intimidated many of the more vulnerable members of the Association, particularly graduate students, from expressing disagreement (Deflem, 2004d). Deflem concurs with other critics of Burawoy (for example Tittle 2004) in arguing that public sociology undermines the credibility of the discipline in the broader society. He sees this as the outcome of overt political stance-taking by sociologists on issues on which they have no special expertise *qua* sociologists.

Deflem, to be sure, has raised some important issues. There are legitimate questions to be asked about the appropriate boundaries between scholarship and advocacy, and Deflem is in the company of many thoughtful scholars in arguing that we should limit the resolutions we pass at the American Sociological Association to questions within our professional competence. There *is* a danger of public sociologies being framed as purely radical sociology, inappropriately marginalizing liberal and conservative examples of our discipline's engagement in the public sphere. It is not appropriate, it should be said, for the leaders of our discipline to assume that everyone within it places themselves on the left of the mainstream political spectrum.

At the same time, Deflem has crossed over the line of legitimate debate into personalized attack in this crusade. Deflem's attack on the ASA staff for contaminating sociology's allegedly purely scientific essence with commercialization by selling merchandise with the ASA logo verges on the absurd, sounding more like a Herbert Marcuse rant than a serious political or intellectual analysis. More important, trying to discredit "public sociologies" as a Marxist conspiracy led by Burawoy verges on red-baiting. This is especially irresponsible at a time when the organized right-wing in the United States is undertaking an energetic and hate filled campaign to "expose" left-wing professors throughout the United States. Given Deflem's complaint that public sociology "narrows the debate," his annoyance with Burawoy's "inviting activists to the ASA meeting" (Deflem, 2004d) is ironic indeed.

To summarize, Burawoy's call for a renewed appreciation and cultivation of public sociology, facilitated by a new understanding of its complementarity with the other major orientations within the discipline, has met with a range of critical responses. Those who embrace his project, nonetheless, question the basis for regarding professional sociology as leading the other orientations. They also question some of the distinctive traits, contributions, and focus that Burawoy has ascribed to public sociology relative to the other types of sociology. Those who are less accepting of public sociology—both from a mainstream academic and a more politically conservative or centrist perspective—share a common concern for preserving the rigor and value-neutrality that has helped earn the discipline respect and influence within the academy. Where Deflem parts company with the mainstream critics is his claim that public sociology represents the left's attempt to hijack the whole discipline.

## *The Case for Burawoy's Public Sociologies*

Burawoy has managed to place himself carefully and creatively between the defenders of sociology's mainstream orthodoxy, on the one hand, and the discipline's radical internal critics. His intervention in the debate could be read as part of the long history of competition between the American Sociological Association's mainstream ASR/AJS elite research oriented establishment and the teaching- and activist-oriented element of the discipline spread throughout sociology departments and other institutional environments outside the most elite universities in the United States. Every few years, it seems, a famous radical sociologist with a base among the more activist and teaching oriented wings of the discipline will win the presidential position in the American Sociological Association, to be followed after that by a more mainstream oriented but equally famous and accomplished scholar. Moreover, there are many followers of the mainstream professional/policy approach teaching at the hundreds of less prestigious colleges throughout the United States. The coalitions that emerge in all this are clearly complicated. Be that as it may, the pendulum tends to swing back and forth, and in the larger picture, everyone in sociology seems relatively happy with the compromises struck between the competing elites in the discipline who are able to mobilize different professional and political bases of support. Burawoy's great accomplishment, in his presidential address at least, was to make the case for a new vision for the discipline without self-righteousness that can flow from the radical reformers who do not recognize the extent to which their own academic fame or elite position shapes the debate.

To his credit, Burawoy has emphasized the importance of looking at the role hierarchy plays in the very particular system of higher education in the United States, as we think about the social origins of radical and public sociologies. As a Berkeley sociologist, Burawoy has access to cultural capital, powerful networks, resources and highly motivated and well-trained graduate students that help his efforts in promoting a vision for public sociologies. Instead of ignoring or obscuring this dynamic, Burawoy develops the point in his thesis VIII "History and Hierarchy" from his ASA presidential address (Burawoy, 2005a: 19). This helps us understand that the maturity of professional sociology that we see today in the United States is the end result of a long historical process and the steeply hierarchical division of labor within the discipline that has centralized enormous cultural capital and resources in the elite private and public research universities in the country. These institutions stand at the top of a system that includes hundreds of lesser status sociology departments engaged primarily in teaching. It is impossible to understand conflict within the American Sociological Association, or the wider debate about "public sociologies" without attention to this institutional context.

The "save sociology" perspective is such a counterproductive force in the discipline because it has taken these spirited and even conflictual debates between competing visions and material bases for the discipline and turned towards a militant attack on public sociology and its advocates. This is happening, ironically, just when there is a possibility that the vocal critical sociologists and militant mainstream sociologists among us are ready to put aside the grudges and counterproductive debates from the past. At the same time, it must be said that part of the reason for polarized debate flows from some intellectual contradictions and problems in Burawoy's intellectual framework for public sociologies. Contrary to

Deflem's approach, we need to address Burawoy's ideas on their own terms—we cannot engage in personal attacks or the dredging up of old stale battles within this or that ASA committee meeting or e-mail list. Burawoy's own radical politics as well as his scholarly credentials are quite clear and out on the table, so the next step must be to critically evaluate his analytic model for thinking about public sociologies in a scholarly way.

Relying on an old fashioned two by two table (paradoxically for someone associated with critical sociology, something Burawoy himself acknowledges with good humor!) has left the door open for Deflem's polemics by giving us a model that does not address some of the intellectual and political contradictions within what he outlines as "critical" and "public sociologies." In addition to the normative and practical questions raised by various critics, more theoretical and conceptual work must be done before Burawoy's approach can serve as a framework for a research agenda on public sociologies. A research agenda will allow us to move the debate beyond political differences, personal self-interest and professional grudges, bringing us together and taking the polemics down a volume notch—we should debate the future of the discipline with analysis and evidence. With this agenda in mind, there are four major problems with Burawoy's analytic model.

### *Is Public Sociology Inherently Reflexive?*

First, the notion that the instrumental axis represented by professional and policy sociology can be contrasted with the reflexive approach of critical and public sociology is problematic. Reflexivity is a complex notion that Burawoy could spend more time explicating. As we understand his thinking on this, reflexive sociology involves some kind of dialogic communication between the researcher-scholar who is practicing it, and those who comprise the audience for her work. In the case of public sociology, this is a dialogue with groups outside of academe regarding "matters of political and moral concern" (Burawoy, 2004a: 5), while for critical sociologists the dialogue is with one's peers in the discipline and focuses on ethical or questions about the discipline itself (Burawoy, 2004a). This stands in contrast to the instrumental orientation of policy and professional sociology, the practice of which is geared to "pre-determined ends" as defined by a client or by the norms and/or puzzle solving projects of scientific research (Burawoy, 2004: 4).

The idea, however, the public sociology is necessarily more reflexive in either intent or consequence than other forms of our disciplinary practice simply does not hold up to scrutiny. An examination of public sociologies in practice from a sociological perspective is illuminating. Public sociology is often written for a book or magazine audience or spoken on radio or television, where market niches, the need for interesting sometimes sensationalized writing and the often polarizing consequence of political polemics makes it arguably harder, not easier, to be reflexive than in purely academic publication forums. Whatever one thinks of the specifics of the contentious debate between Loïc Wacquant and various sociological ethnographers in the *American Journal of Sociology* a number of years ago (Anderson, 2002; Duneier, 2002; Newman, 2002; Wacquant, 2002), the level of reflexivity of public ethnographies was at the centre of the disagreement. Similar dynamics may be operating in the new blog environment.

Writing for, and engaging, the public with our scholarship can certainly be reflexive and give rise to dialogue and debate. It can also, however, feed into the

celebrity dynamics of the modern “fame game” in academics. It creates reputations for influential scholars based on polarizing arguments. It can reinforce the worst of public perceptions of the poor and oppressed or provide evidence that is used by powerful political forces for their own purposes. Was William Julius Wilson being “reflexive” when he allowed his excellent piece of historical sociology to be titled “the declining significance of race” by a sale conscious editor, creating a media storm, a heated political debate within our profession, and a major reputational boost to his career (Steinberg, 1995)? Was C. Wright Mills being “reflexive” when he penned *Listen Yankee*, an anti-imperialist polemic that seems to, in retrospect, be less critical of Castro’s version of communism than might be called for, at least from the perspective of many thoughtful scholars and intellectuals? Was the great American public sociologist David Riesman particularly reflexive when he publicly critiqued the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) campaign based on his own particular version of old fashioned elite liberalism (Riesman, [1954] 1993)? Personally, we are sympathetic to all these three examples of public sociologists, despite this or that political or intellectual disagreement. Our sense is that the question of whether these particular thinkers are being reflexive, however, is often a proxy for the question of whether one agrees with their particular politics.

There is nothing in public sociology that is, *by definition*, reflexive. Michael Lynch (2000) provides an extensive overview of the various meanings of reflexivity in sociological thought. He identifies six main categories of reflexivity, and a variety of subcategories, sharing a process of “recursive turning back, but what does the turning, how it turns, and with what implications differs from category to category and even from one case to another within a given category” (34).<sup>3</sup> For him, reflexivity is not necessarily radical or critical, although many proponents of reflexivity characterize it in just this way.

Burawoy (2005a) uses reflexivity quite broadly, saying that “[r]eflexive knowledge interrogates the value premises of society as well as our profession” (11). His purpose is simply to define reflexive sociological practice in opposition to what he calls “instrumental” sociology, or sociology for the purposes of “solving” (11) a puzzle or problem of the social world. For Burawoy, then reflexivity—with its focus on the ends, rather than the means of sociological practice—is not what Lynch (2000) would call methodological, but perhaps closer to a substantive, modernist conception of reflexivity. Reflexivity is not the exclusive domain of sociologists who consider themselves “public” or “policy” sociologists, but is integral to the practice of sociology, regardless of audience. Burawoy’s reliance on a substantive, critical sense of reflexivity allows him to make this distinction, which is (as Lynch (2000) demonstrates so effectively), quite an oversimplification. The only way in which public and critical sociologies can be considered less instrumental is to ignore the fundamental fact of the market/audience forces at work in those pursuits. They are different, to be sure, than those which drive Burawoy’s “instrumental” knowledge production, but they cannot be distinguished on the basis of an overly-broad conception of reflexivity.

Professional, policy, and public sociologies, however, can all be defined clearly and unambiguously by the nature of the audience for the work. Professional sociologists write for their peers, policy sociologists have a client audience among policy makers in mind when they write, and public sociologies engage the public outside their professional mandate as teachers and textbook writers.<sup>4</sup> Critical soci-

ology, in contrast, is defined by a combination of the audience (work written to an audience of professional scholars, as well as possibly students) and the nature of the ideas (it must deal with foundational ethical concerns). Public sociology's place in the two by two table simply does not capture these complexities, and creates a not totally unreasonable suspicion that Burawoy is trying to sneak his politics into the analysis by stealth.

Burawoy's analysis offered in "For Public Sociology" seemed to open up the possibility that he would accept the liberal Riesman, the neo-conservative Daniel Bell, Philip Reiff, or even Herbert Spencer as legitimate parts of the history of public sociologies. But would he? One suspects that the type of public sociology Burawoy supports will be defined in good Gramscian terms as "organic" versus "traditional" forms of public sociologies, the organic version of the social type being heralded as the truly reflexive ideal. But are "organic intellectuals" necessarily more reflexive than professional sociologists? Gramsci certainly was an important contributor to radical political thought and the sociology of intellectuals, but was his relationship to Italian peasants and the Communist Party fully reflexive, or was there not serious problems of representation and elitism embedded in his analysis alongside his undoubted insights (Gramsci, 1971; Walzer, 1988)?

The same question can be asked of DuBois, a sociologist one can admire, while disagreeing with his relationship to the Communist Movement. While critical sociologists such as Gouldner are highly reflexive in some of their writings, however, one cannot argue that all of Gouldner's theoretical arguments, political interventions and professional activities can be defined by their reflexivity (Chriss, 1999). The same is certainly true with Bourdieu, another great representative of reflexivity and someone certainly capable of dogmatism (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Swartz, 2003).<sup>5</sup> And then there is Anthony Giddens, a thinker who writes extensively about reflexivity but is engaged in marketing his textbooks as much as anything else, while being a very instrumental "public intellectual" for the New Labour (Fuller 2000)!<sup>6</sup> Reflexivity is possible, we think, and should be a goal to aim for, but it cannot serve as a major criterion for a researchable model for understanding the sociology of academic knowledge. Reflexivity, all too often, is a term used in legitimizing rhetoric not analytic inquiry. Our preference would be to drop the reflexive versus instrumental axis of the Burawoy model, define the question to be discussed based on audience (professional, policy and public sociologies, for example), allow for political diversity among public sociologies and then unpack further the notion of critical sociology.

### *What Is Critical Sociology?*

This unpacking of "critical sociology" is our second major critique of the Burawoy model. There are, unfortunately, real ambiguities in his implicit definition of this type of sociology. We know that C. Wright Mills' critique of mainstream sociology in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) was, at least to some extent motivated by his professional ambitions and desire for intellectual attention (Oakes and Vidich, 1999). One can identify with Mills' vision for sociology, as we do, without ignoring the complexities of this notion of "critical sociology." Is it unreasonable to suggest that much of the "critical theory" we see in contemporary academic work is, for example, an element of the professional academic competition we see all

around us? Are the mountains of academic “critical theory” in our libraries today a pure critical attempt to develop a consensus on “knowledge for what” or is much of this work part of professional academic competition itself, undertaken by other means?

A closer look at the example of the original critical theory represented by the Frankfurt School suggests the latter is often the case. There is no question that the Frankfurt School critique of instrumental rationality has had enormous influence in social science, and has been integrated into Burawoy’s own typology. But is his account of the critical theorists really accurate and illuminating for us today, or does it contribute to various “origin myths” about the purity of “critical theory”? A closer look at the actual history of the Frankfurt School and its reception shows an enormous amount of professional manoeuvring and instrumental academic politics undertaken behind the scenes (McLaughlin, 1999). Adorno, in particular, played a central role in making sure that the authors for *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) volume were listed in alphabetical order, resulting in hundreds of citations to Adorno et al. (Wiggerhaus, 1994). Moreover, it should be said, the critical theorists exhibited an enormous lack of reflexivity as to how the values, class, gender and national positions of the critical theorists themselves shaped their own intellectual and political views. The great unwritten story of the Frankfurt School is how they used the effective grant writing skill of their former collaborator Paul Lazarsfeld during the 1930s and 1940s to replenish the depleted funds they were bestowed with in the 1920s from a wealthy German grain merchant, later repaying Lazarsfeld’s help with the infamous and polarized attacks on ‘positivism’ when they returned to Germany (Wiggerhaus, 1994; Fuller, 2004). After following this history, when someone claims the mantle of a critical sociologist today, one is justified in wondering whether there are professional or political goals being covered up (McLaughlin, 1999). Being critical is a normative goal (Hammersley, 2005), and like reflexivity it is not a researchable analytic category for sociological analysis.

Part of the problem here is that Burawoy (2005a) uses critical to mean two different things. In “For Public Sociologies” critical means a reflexive and critical engagement with the core moral priorities of social science research. But in other writings, particularly in Burawoy’s contribution to the *Critical Sociology* exchange, he clearly means political radical and left wing, a subset, it seems to us, of the critical sociologies that surely would include liberals even conservatives. The issues get interesting when one gets specific.

Would Burawoy concede that Robert Nisbet, the great late conservative sociological theorist from the University of California at Riverside and Berkeley, was a critical sociologist who put the issues of the ultimate goals of sociological analysis on the table for a discussion? Few sociologists have been as critical of professional narrowness as Nisbet. He clearly was centrally concerned with the ultimate ends for sociology as a discipline and moral/intellectual enterprise (Nisbet, 1966; 1976). If C. Wright Mills, Alvin Gouldner, DuBois, Dorothy Smith, and Bourdieu are critical sociologists, but Nisbet is not, is “critical sociology” then just a less straightforward term for politically radical sociology? Would Burawoy include in his critical sociology, intellectually serious but religiously conservative sociologists who raise fundamental questions about the moral obligations of social science research? Or Philip Rieff? Or Alan Wolfe’s work, as he has moved from this New Left position in

the 1960s to a more centrist liberalism that takes the questions of sociology's moral obligations very seriously indeed (Wolfe, 1989; 1998; 2003)? Deflem has dealt with these questions in an unhelpful way, but the basic question is not unreasonable. The authors of this article consider ourselves to be critical sociologists, but this position flows from our politics not from some generic notion of "reflexivity" that serves to hide—rather than openly deal with—potential political biases. Expanding what we mean by "critical" in ways that do not refer exclusively to political positions (or by finding a less politically charged way of labelling this type of sociology) is an important first step to help us avoid political posturing and counterposturing so that public sociologies might be studied empirically. We will be engaging in this empirical analysis elsewhere, but here we offer an exploration of some of the issues we believe must be addressed.

### *Comparative Institutional Analysis*

A major problem with Burawoy's analytic model is that it does not allow for an analysis of the institutional environments that shape the dynamics of public sociologies in a comparative context. Burawoy is fully aware of these processes, having written extensively in comparative sociology, often with a central concern for structures and institutional dynamics. Moreover, he goes to great lengths to emphasize the very particular institutional dynamics of American sociology. Sociology in the United States is a form of academic practice that is embedded in a unique system of higher education in the United States. American sociology relates, in important and complex ways, to the very distinctive state, social service institutions, business elites, and student clients that make up the institutional environment for sociology in the United States. Burawoy's simple two by two table, however, does not allow us to model in analytic ways how his categories of professional, policy, critical, and public sociologies are related to outside institutions. Moreover, all of this is different in distinct national contexts, something worth theorizing in more detail.

Defining public sociologies as inherently part of the reflexive axis of his model hides the extent to which the different institutional arrangements in distinct nations will shape the practice of public academic life. How are newspapers, electronic media and the university sector organized in different nations? How might this shape the nature of public debate? What is the role of the state in university life, in different nations? What is the relative size and resource basis of university sectors in distinct nations? How are distinct states and governance structures different, and how might this shape the ways in which policy sociology operates? What about the role of think tanks and social movements in different national environments? Burawoy is certainly aware of all these issues, and puts a particular stress on the uniqueness of the steeply hierarchical, combined public and private and resource rich American higher education system. Most sociologists in other countries are more public, *precisely* because they operate in societies where the university systems are different from that of American higher education. Burawoy makes these points in his highly persuasive speeches and writings, but for the purposes of greater analytical clarity and empirical research, it would be helpful to be able to capture these institutional dynamics within a general framework of how sociology is practiced that could be operationalized, measured and visually represented in a more complex way than Burawoy has done so far.

## *Comparing Disciplines*

Then there is the issue of disciplines. Burawoy and Deflem share a common commitment to the health and growth of sociology as a discipline, but neither of them has outlined a theoretically informed approach to thinking about sociology in comparative context. Sociology, to be sure, is not the only discipline that has a professional, policy, critical, and public face, but Burawoy's model, in particular does not give us a way to think about this comparatively.

Burawoy's simple two by two table leads us to believe that, for example, the size of the various professional, policy, critical, and public wings in each discipline should be the same. Is that the case? Economics, one would think, has a far larger policy wing that does history or philosophy. But how many economists engage in "critical economics" where they debate the fundamental ethical of their professional activity? Is it difficult to imagine that the critical wing of sociology might be far larger in sociology than in economics? And might it be closer to the core of the discipline, while "critical economics" would be near the very edge of the legitimate boundaries of the profession? History as a discipline, in contrast, is likely to have a very large public component, as professional historians have long been involved in writing histories of presidents, kings and queens, military conflicts, and nations themselves, and more recently have focused on labor, gender, race, and local communities, all representing issues of some interest to the public. Historians, we are sure, do have a role to play in policy but it is at least worth hypothesizing that their policy wing is less developed than is the case in political science, certainly, but also sociology and economics. Psychology, to be sure, has a strong presence among the public, as the examples of *Psychology Today* and the various best-selling popular psychoanalysts and self-help writers remind (McLaughlin, 1998; McGee, 2005; Park, 2004).

In addition, it is worth theorizing and eventually researching the question of how the critical wings of different disciplines are related to their respective professional practices. Critical sociology, we would argue, could be placed graphically near the very center of sociology. What sociologist is unaware of C. Wright Mills' powerful critique of Parson's grand theory and Lazarsfeld's abstracted empiricism, representative versions of professional and policy sociologies from sociology's golden era of the "1950s?" (Mills, 1959). In addition, while Dorothy Smith (e.g., Smith, 1991; 1995) might claim that her work as been marginalized within sociology, what other social science, with the possible exception of anthropology, discusses such sharp critiques of its own discipline's gender practices so prominently in its theory textbooks (for example, Bailey and Gayle, 1993; Farganis, 1996; Ritzer 2000a; 2000b). No other major social science discipline debates its various institutional and epistemological crises as energetically and as often, with the possible exception of anthropology, as sociology does. This is related to the centrality of critical sociology relative to the comparative marginality of "critical economics," "critical psychology," or "critical political science." Burawoy's two by two table with its instrumental and reflexive axis, does not allow us to think analytically about how disciplines differ according to the very categories he reifies in his model.

## *Conclusion: Towards Public Sociologies*

We are not suggesting that there exist some universal patterns in the inter-relations among the major categories of sociological practice, torn out of national and historical context. We believe, for example, that critical sociology and policy sociology are both relatively large in Canada, with professional and public sociology relatively undeveloped in comparison to the United States (McLaughlin, 2005).<sup>7</sup> In addition we know, for example, that policy sociology in South Africa was highly involved in the development of the Apartheid regime throughout the 1960s and 1970s in a period where critical, liberal and especially black scholars were being jailed or repressed by the state in vicious ways (Ally, 2005). Policy, public and critical sociology seem highly developed in Great Britain, with a very small professional sociology core (Abrams, 1968; Fuller, 2000; Halsey, 2004; Platt, 2003). These national variations, alongside comparative analysis of different disciplines, make for a research project of some importance and scope, something to which we hope to contribute as part of a project on “Public Academics in Canada.”

For some, Burawoy’s vision of professional, policy, critical and public sociologies working together is a utopian vision, at best, or a cover for his own political agenda, at worst. We would like to convert the issue into various empirical and analytic questions, the most important being under what sociological conditions can these four faces of the sociological imagination live together productively in stable coalitions rooted in academic excellence that can anchor a strong discipline of sociology while contributing to the broader society?

Before engaging in this larger research project, we have tried to show here, however, that sociology in particular, does not need saving in the ways that Deflem is suggesting. Burawoy’s agenda for public sociologies is a far more compelling vision for the discipline, albeit one with its own intellectual and analytic limitations. Dropping the reflexive axis from Burawoy’s two by two table, thinking more deeply about what we mean by “critical,” and embedding our analysis in a model that leaves room for national and institutional context and empirical comparative research on disciplines, provides for, we have argued, an analytic way forward in the coming debates on the future of public sociologies. The “audience” for academic works could be operationalized and measured comparatively (both in terms of nations and disciplines) while the level of “reflexivity” and “criticalness” strikes us as an empirical dead-end that would lead to more posturing than insight.

In any case, it is our view that the strength of sociology as a discipline will depend on preserving the unique, balanced and complimentary space for policy, professional, critical and public sociologies outlined in Burawoy’s (2005a) inspirational speech at the 2004 ASA meeting. The devil, of course, is in the details—something that ASA committee on public sociology has been working on, and sociologists around the country have been debating. We have offered here some thoughts on Burawoy’s model that can lead towards the development of a road map for empirical research that can help us preserve sociology’s unique moral and intellectual energy while being realistic about the institutional, academic and political context we must operate in. “Saving sociology,” by attacking its public and critical wings is, however, just about the last thing we need to be doing as a discipline in the coming period.

## Notes

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At the 2005 annual meeting of the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association in London, Ontario, Canadian sociologists Lisa Kowalchuk and Jeffrey Cormier organized two panels on the theme. In the first of these, panelists focused on the historical development and institutional incentive structures for publicly-oriented sociology in Canadian academe. Participants in the second panel analysed their own experiences in applying their sociological expertise and knowledge to various public realms. These panels were part of a larger Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded project to empirically study academics as public intellectuals in Canada being undertaken by Neil McLaughlin, Lisa Kowalchuk and Jeffrey Cormier. Please address correspondence to Neil McLaughlin, Associate Professor, Sociology, McMaster University, KTH 620 1280 Main Street West, Hamilton, Ontario, L8S 4M4, Canada, (nmclaugh@mcmaster.ca).
2. Interestingly, Burawoy says little about psychology, a discipline that we would argue is too rooted in methodological individualism and positivism to contribute in useful ways to public intellectual life. Psychology is a discipline, nonetheless, which does have a very large public face and competes with us very directly in our universities.
3. The categories are mechanical reflexivity, substantive reflexivity, methodological reflexivity, meta-theoretical reflexivity, interpretative reflexivity and ethnomethodological reflexivity (Lynch 2000).
4. We would define the teaching role as the public face of professional sociology, not as public sociology *per se*, a role that, for us, involves activity outside the formal professional work academics do as professors.
5. Burawoy’s point about the complexity of each type of sociology is well taken, but his caveat about the pathology of dogmatism in critical sociology does not get around the fact that his model puts “critical” as *inherently* in the reflexive space.
6. Giddens (1990) points to the ongoing “monitoring of behaviour and its contexts” (37) as a “defining characteristic of all human action” (36). Modern social life raises this reflexive process to a new level, as “social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character” (38). Sociology is of particular significance in this process, as it is “the most generalized type of reflection upon modern social life” (41). By extension, then public sociologies should factor even more significantly in the modern process of reflexive monitoring. Of course, to the extent that expert knowledge becomes indistinguishable from “knowledge applied in lay actions” (45), the distinction between sociology and lay knowledge, and therefore, between sociology, public sociology, and lay knowledge is potentially non-existent in the end. No wonder that some have argued that Giddens has not been good for British sociology’s institutional health despite the claim of Beck that more mainstream sociology is bound for the museum (Fuller 2000; Beck 2005).
7. At a recent discussion of public sociologies in Canada at McMaster University, Carl Cuneo made the case that Canadian sociology does indeed have a strong public sociology component, in the form of the networks of the Canadian political economy perspective centered around the journal *Studies in Political Economy*. This is arguable. While there are organic public sociologists in English Canada, I would make the case that the traditional elite public intellectual role is dominated by old fashioned “Tory” oriented scholars in the humanities, as well as philosophers and scholars from other disciplines, at least when compared to the United States. These are partly empirical questions, something being explored in our project on “Public Academics in Canada” sponsored by SSHRC. At the same event, Scott Davies made the case that it is important for Canadian sociology to “go professional” before going further down the policy, critical and organic public sociology paths. For different views from Canada, see Ericson 2005 and Hall 2005. The issue will play out quite differently in Quebec Burawoy’s discussion of public sociologies in Norway makes for particularly interesting reading for sociologists living in nations with relatively smaller populations and social democratic traditions. These are questions worth debating in both normative and empirical terms, in Canada and globally.

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