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Address to C-SAP Annual Conference, Cardiff, November 22, 2008

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## What might we mean by a pedagogy of public sociology?

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The first and most obvious meaning of a pedagogy of public sociology is simply the teaching of public sociology, that is the imparting to students of a skill or particular practice. Here I think of the movement for service learning and civic education that has taken root in the United States. Students are sent out to serve and learn from civic organizations as part of courses in family, work, organizations, etc. For sociologists, but also anthropologists and political scientists, this is an extension of the classroom into civil society. In this address I would like to place this and similar endeavors under the umbrella of teaching *as public sociology* by which I mean constituting students as a potential public, engaging with them as a community with pre-existing experience that they bring into the classroom. Teaching turns this community into a public and connects it to other publics beyond the university.

There is, however, a second meaning of the pedagogy of public sociology. Here we are concerned not with the reconstitution and extension of the private space of the classroom into civil society, but with turning the public realm into a new type of classroom. You might call that teaching in public, the theme of this conference, of which one prototype might be the Open University. Here teaching actually takes place in public, in principle accessible to all. I want to embed teaching in public within the framework of *public sociology as teaching* in which the relation of sociologists to publics is viewed as a pedagogical relation. This would range from the most mediated

interaction between sociologist and public, such as the television lecture, to the most unmediated face-to-face interaction, such as the sociologist engaged with victims of domestic violence.

I will tackle this second meaning of the pedagogy of public sociology – *public sociology as teaching* -- via the first idea of *teaching as public sociology*. Before we can even approach the pedagogy of public sociology, however, we have to know what we mean by public sociology and how it fits into the broader field of sociology. I should note that I refer here to sociology since this is the field I am most familiar with, but I think similar arguments could be made for the other social sciences.

### **Public sociology within the field of sociology**

The intuition behind public sociology is simple. It refers to the engagement of sociologists with publics in which each brings something to the table, and each learns and adjusts to the other in a relation of dialogue and reciprocity. The sociologist brings acquired skills and knowledge that locates everyday life in its broader context while publics bring their concerns and interests that makes them a discursive community. At one end of the spectrum you have what I call traditional public sociologists, such as Frank Furedi, who will be talking to us tomorrow – social scientists who appear on television, radio, newspapers, disseminating sociological perspectives on pressing public issues. Furedi, as you know, writes for a wide range of newspapers including *The Times*, *The Times Higher Educational Supplement*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *The Guardian*. He has written a series of widely accessible books on moral panics, the degradation of political culture, the dumbing down of higher education, the disappearance of public intellectuals, and

societal paranoia, most recently with regard to the war on terror, and so on. He brings an original sociological perspective to and incites debate on the lived experience of Britain today. But, as far as I know, his publics are broad and national, relatively passive and anonymous; they are thin and populated by people often unknown to one another.

Very different are the organic public sociologists who engage directly with specific, local publics that are thick and active. As part of their research methodology feminists have been pioneers in such unmediated interaction with the people they have studied. Think, for example, of the exemplary work of Liz Kelly and the research organization she directs at the London Metropolitan University, the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit. While in recent years their research has reached out to many audiences it began by working directly with concerned publics – survivors of abuse, women's groups, and professionals. Today it has become publicly renowned for its research on the incidence of rape, trafficking in women, and child abuse, and related issues.

Also at the London Metropolitan University can be found other projects of public sociology. For example, at the cross roads of traditional and organic public sociologies can be found John Gabriel's innovative dialogue with London's refugees. Field workers were selected from 15 refugee communities, trained as interviewers, and sent back into the communities to gather oral histories. The resulting materials – photographic and textual – were compiled in a publicly accessible manner and displayed in local community centers and also brought together in an exhibition at the London Museum. Here the sociologist organizes and displays research and in so doing generates public discussion about refugees, seeking to heighten awareness of their plight and destigmatize their presence in London. In the process both the interviewers and

interviewees develop a new consciousness of the place of refugees in society. Through the research they become, in short, a public in their own right. I have no doubt that many of you here today could offer countless other examples of public sociology, especially organic public sociology, which, paradoxically, so often remains a hidden face of our professional lives.

On the face of it there is nothing especially controversial about public sociology. To be sure it can involve complicated ethical and methodological issues, linked to privacy and accountability, but the idea looks innocent enough. Until, that is, it is located in the field of social science, or, for the purposes of this talk, in the field of sociology. It becomes controversial when it is distinguished from and brought into relation with other types of sociology. The first distinction I would like to make is between public and policy sociology. Both are accountable to extra-academic audiences but in different ways. The idea behind public sociology is a reciprocal communication, a two-way dialogue between sociologist and public whereas in policy sociology the sociologist serves a client who determines the problem to be solved (or solution to be legitimated). This is the world of the technician, the expert, the consultant who sells services for a fee. Formulated in this way naturally puts the policy sociologist on the defensive as a mercenary, as selling his or her independence, or as commodifying and, therefore, distorting intellectual work. In practice, there may be ample room for negotiation and dialogue between sociologist and client who, indeed, may act more like a patron than a client. Moreover, policy research may help fund public sociology, as is the case in the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit. The influence can work in the opposite direction -- public sociology does not necessarily stop with public discussion as an end in itself, but may then mobilize such discussion to influence policy decisions. Whatever the synergy, public sociology is

nonetheless often seen as the enemy, or at least the conscience, of policy sociology, pointing out the values and goals that policy makers and, thus, policy research take for granted. It is not surprising, therefore, that policy sociologists are often hostile to the very distinction between policy and public sociologists.

The next controversy arrives with the separation of policy and public sociology, which speak to extra-academic audiences, from professional sociology whose audience is made up of peers. Professional sociologists develop research programs with their distinctive methodologies, theories, problematics, providing the necessary foundation for policy and public sociology. They, too, are implicitly put on the defensive when interrogated about what “good” their sociology does for society. They, in turn, feel ill at ease when sociology is represented in the wider world as policy and public sociology! They fear that public engagement will politicize and delegitimize their protected science. They denounce public sociology as “pop” sociology. They countenance public sociology so long as it is under their control. They are reluctant to recognize that public and policy sociologies have often inspired exciting new research developments in such areas as gender relations, immigration, political sociology, etc. I should not exaggerate or universalize academic resistance to public sociology. Still, in the debates about public sociology not just in the United States but also in the leading UK journals, such as *Sociology* and the *British Journal of Sociology*, I do detect a certain reserve and caution in the stances adopted by professional sociology – a point emphasized by Peter Hodgkinson, in the paper he is presenting at this conference.

The final distinction I’d like to make is between critical and professional sociology. In the United States where the social sciences have been far more rigidly bounded by their

disciplines, critical sociology arose to attack professional narrowness. One thinks of Robert Lynd's, *Knowledge for What?*, C Wright Mills's, *The Sociological Imagination*, Pitirim Sorokin's *Fads and Foibles in Modern Sociology* or Alvin Gouldner's *Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*. They all take to task the assumptions and practices of professional sociology, usually seen to be in cahoots with policy sociology. In Britain where disciplinary boundaries are far more porous and research paradigms far looser, the demarcation between professional and critical sociology is more blurred. The analytical foundation of that distinction, however, remains – social science develops within research programs on the basis of an unquestioning negative heuristic, sets of assumptions, methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and above all value stances that are taken for granted. It is impossible to do serious, engaged research while at the same time questioning its foundations. It's like playing chess while simultaneously questioning the rules of the game. Thus, the role of critical sociology is to interrogate those underlying assumptions by standing outside research programs. Professional sociology ignores, dismisses or denounces critical sociology precisely because it questions the grounds upon which its enterprise rests.

That leaves us with four types of sociology: professional, critical, policy and public. Is there a rationale for these four types and only these types? I believe there is. They are a response to two fundamental questions that, as social scientists, we tend to treat too lightly: Knowledge for Whom? and Knowledge for What? Are we talking to ourselves or to others, to fellow social scientists or to audiences beyond the academy? That's "knowledge for whom?," now "knowledge for what?" Are we concerned with *reflexive knowledge* – discussion of value and goals, as we are in the case of critical sociology and public sociology? Or are we focused on means, that is on *instrumental knowledge*,

whether solving the puzzles of our research programs, that take as given their assumptions and underlying values, as in the case of professional sociology, or answering to the problems defined by the goals of patrons or clients in the case of policy sociology? This sets up the following matrix that I call the division of sociological labor. As I said before, I think this scheme applies equally to other disciplines, although the balance among the four knowledges may be different.

### **The Division of Sociological Labor**

	<b>Academic Audience</b>	<b>Extra-Academic Audience</b>
<b>Instrumental Knowledge</b>	PROFESSIONAL SOCIOLOGY	POLICY SOCIOLOGY
<b>Reflexive Knowledge</b>	CRITICAL SOCIOLOGY	PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY

Let us be clear, these are four different types of knowledge, so that any given sociologist can undertake two or even three types of sociology simultaneously, and their careers move in and out of the types. The underlying supposition of this characterization of our field is that a vibrant sociology walks on all four legs, that professional, policy, public and critical sociologies are interdependent and synergistic forms of knowledge. That is not to deny antagonisms among these sociologies. As I indicated above, there are indeed antagonisms, based on the array of divergent interests within our discipline, but there are also interdependencies that together give rise to different configurations of domination among the four knowledges, configurations that vary over time, by country,



by region, by discipline, etc. Still, if one of these types is cut off from the others it easily assumes a pathological form: professional and critical sociologies become *introverted* (irrelevant on the one hand and dogmatic on the other), while policy and public sociologies become *extraverted* (captured by clients on the one hand and populist with respect to publics on the other). Our examples, above, of public sociology illustrate both the connections among the different types of sociology as well as the dangers of focusing on one to the exclusion of all others. I could devote a lot more time to the broad ramifications of this matrix, but I am concerned here with the implications for teaching.

### **Teaching as Public Sociology**

Just as there are four types of sociology, there are four corresponding types of teaching. Teaching professional sociology is first and foremost transmitting knowledge about the foundations and perspectives of sociology. It is the sociology presented in text books and introductory courses where we tell students what is the nature of sociology, what marks sociology off from other disciplines, and what sociological research has shown. In the United States, at least, most undergraduate teaching is done in this vain. There is another type of teaching, however, that is less concerned with knowledge and more with practice, with specific skill development. These are the more vocationally oriented programs, such as criminology, the training of police officers, which is often closely allied to sociology. The concern here is not so much with widening horizons through sociological knowledge but acquiring a credential. The distinction between these two types of teaching is not hard and fast. We know only too well that sociology majors may care only about the diploma or degree, seeing sociology as a soft option, just as criminology courses bring new vistas to the professionals they train. Whatever their

divergence, both fall into the “instrumental” approach to teaching, which is not to denigrate them but to highlight their specificity.

What is the critical approach to teaching? It is an approach that is critical of the instrumental sociology for assuming students are empty vessels ready to be filled with sociological truths. Instead, the critical approach assumes that students do come armed with their own experience, which critical teaching acknowledges through a dialogue with students. Here the educator is also educated, and the student also becomes a teacher. A critical approach not only regards teaching as a two-way relationship but also as a product of the context within which it takes place. It is self-conscious about the place of teaching within the overall context of the university. Indeed, some of the most successful sociology courses are based on field studies of the university within which they take place. Critical teaching bleeds into teaching as public sociology.

So what, then, is the fourth type, teaching as public sociology? It is different from simply teaching public sociology, which might be an account of the way sociology has had an impact on the wider society. This could be part of an introductory course and some textbooks do now highlight cases of public sociology. Teaching public sociology could also appear as a policy orientation, that is to say teaching the tricks of the trade to students who want to do public sociology. Indeed, in the United States, a number of universities have introduced MA Programs in Public Sociology.

But *teaching as public sociology* is something different, it is an extension of critical teaching in a “public” direction. It is a pedagogy that starts out from the idea that students are themselves a public or a potential public that emerges in three dialogues.

- The first dialogue is that between the teacher and the student. As in critical pedagogy the student is a carrier of lived experience and the teacher takes that as point of departure, giving it meaning in a wider context through lectures, practica and reading. In this perspective students also enter an internal dialogue with themselves, enlarging their self-understanding through the course materials and the introjection of the teacher.
- The second dialogue is a dialogue *among* the students themselves. If they are to form a public they must be in conversation with one another. Teaching as public sociology orchestrates such a dialogue around the interpretation of divergent lived experience through common texts and assignments. Every effort is made to forge a common dialogue among students that also facilitates their individual expression.
- The third dialogue is based on students as a public among other publics. If students form a primary public then teaching as public sociology engineers a further dialogue with a series of secondary publics – secondary in the sense that they are beyond the immediate reach of the teacher, and beyond the students themselves – they may be family, occupational group, homeless, etc. As students become aware of themselves as a public, through interacting with other publics, they also make those secondary publics more aware of themselves as publics. I don't imagine this to be confined to service learning in the sense of students being useful to some organization, but students trying to involve others in what they have learned at the university. Furthermore, the engagement with these secondary publics may take place during the formal education process but

it also refers to the dialogue students have with the world around them after completing their degree. This third step is obviously the most difficult and about which I know the least.

There are many concrete examples that approach teaching as public sociology. At this conference, yesterday, Chris Gifford from the University of Huddersfield gave a paper on how he works with his undergraduate students to stimulate debates around citizenship in secondary schools. At lunch I was listening to Louise Hardwick of Liverpool University describe the way she orchestrates yearlong undergraduate placements to explore community needs, and the discussions this generates both inside and outside the university.

At Berkeley my colleagues Mary Kelsey and Brian Powers developed introductory courses, enrolling several hundred students, under the sponsorship of the Mellon Foundation's support for research-based learning. They both take the lived reality of their students as point of departure. Mary Kelsey, for example, starts with data sets on two schools from divergent neighborhoods in the San Francisco Bay Area, attended by students from different socio-economic, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and with different test scores. She shows how this data can be found on the Internet – the digital world all too familiar to the students in her class. She then asked her students to investigate their own schools from the same electronic data set. In dialogue with one another in groups of three, students write papers on their own schooling experience, illuminated by the data they have collected and interpreted through the experiences of their peers. The papers are read, exchanged, discussed, and evaluated within the groups. Through the semester she introduces sociology monographs on education and society that build on and then

build up this experience. Brian Powers takes a slightly different approach, but the idea is the same. He starts not with schools but with individuals, getting them to talk with other students about their own background against data sets on the life style of different socio-economic groups. He then asks them to interview people (non-students) from very different backgrounds and find out about their lives. In this way they begin to understand who they are within the wider social structure and they make steps toward a dialogue with other publics.

If this triple dialogue – student-teacher, student-student, student-public – defines the parameters of teaching *as public sociology*, can we now apply these principles to *public sociology as teaching*, that is teaching in public?

### **Public Sociology as Teaching**

Here I can only begin to point to a few perspectives that might be relevant to public sociology as teaching. We can begin with traditional public sociology speaking to broad, thin, passive, anonymous, usually mainstream publics. This is the orthodox “banking” approach to teaching in public. It is a relation mediated by electronic, print, or visual media that stamp and constrain the message. I earlier referred to Frank Furedi, but we could equally have chosen Anthony Giddens – perhaps the most celebrated British case of traditional public sociology. Although he does not regard his audience as empty vessels he nonetheless does see common sense as malleable and educable. He once wrote that sociology does not appear to advance because its ideas are so rapidly assimilated by the public. What is sociology today is common sense tomorrow! The distinction of modern society is the capacity of individuals and, indeed, societies to

reflexively monitor themselves, and therefore self-consciously develop. In his view, therefore, there is not much resistance to implanting the message of sociology.

At the other end of the spectrum we find Pierre Bourdieu who regards common sense as recalcitrant: a deeply incorporated habitus, resistant to change, preventing people absorbing the sociological message, and appreciating the conditions of their own subjugation. He is very suspicious of sociologists trying to teach people anything – it is likely as not to turn into an exercise of manipulation rather than education. His prototype of manipulation is the formation of public opinion through surveys. If there is a pedagogical relation it is the opposite of Giddens, sociologists can only learn from the people, and even then sociologists have to be vigilant in not succumbing to scholastic fallacies, imposing their own (mis)interpretations on the data they gather. For Bourdieu science is for the scientists and if there is to be dissemination it is best to aim at fellow intellectuals.

Between Giddens's optimism and Bourdieu's pessimism there lies public sociology as a two-way pedagogical relation. Let me consider the three dialogues I proposed above when speaking of teaching as public sociology. First there is the relation of teacher and taught. The writings of Paulo Freire stress this relationship. He does not deny that among subaltern classes there is a deeply embedded false consciousness, the internalization of oppression. The intellectual qua teacher has to liberate the subjugated from their fatalism through a pedagogical relation that begins with the joint interrogation of their life problems, situating those problems in their structural context, what he calls limit situations, which, in turn, disclose alternatives of untested feasibility. The teacher,

therefore, has to immerse him or herself in the lives of the taught. Feminism also adopted similar methodologies.

The extension of the first dialogue to a second dialogue among the members of the public itself is the focus of the action sociology developed by Alain Touraine and his collaborators. Here the sociologist intervenes as an observer and participant in a social movement, searching for unattached militants to form "conscientizing" groups. Within these groups, the sociologist orchestrates discussion, reflection, and self-analysis with the help of interlocutors, brought in from outside. They may be allies or enemies, but they stimulate deeper, reflective discussion about the conditions of possibility of social transformation through an expanding social movement. They have done this successfully with student movements, environmental movement, and working class movements such as Polish *Solidarity*. The question, of course, is how to develop publics when there are no social movements. What sort of intervention is called for in such cases? In this regard, one of my colleagues in China, Shen Yuan, has called Touraine to task for emphasizing weak rather than strong intervention!

The third dialogue entails bringing different publics together. This is, of course, the most challenging project of all. To appreciate just how difficult it is, one can turn to the writings of Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, who saw the transformation of contemporary society as requiring what he called a "war of position" – a struggle that would entail linking institutions of civil society in a common project shaped by a collective intellectual, which he called the Modern Prince. He was, of course, referring to the Communist Party, or at least a particular vision of the communist party that would have a powerful and

responsive educative function. Gramsci was writing in the heyday of communism in the 1920s and 1930s, so now we must ask what might be the Modern Prince of today?

### **Concluding Remarks**

In the face of third-wave marketization -- the hurricane of market fundamentalism that is devastating societies across the globe -- what can hold humanity together? Where do our social sciences stand on this question? In the United States, at least, the centers of gravity of the disciplines of economics and political science lie on the side of the market and the state, leaving sociology, anthropology, geography, and various inter-disciplinary entities with their centers of gravity on the side of society. A pedagogy of public sociology (and its allied disciplines) seeks to build up an awareness of the issues at stake in reconstituting civil society. The corporatization of the university, the regulation of its faculty and students, and the commodification of education occurs combined with the mediatization and commercial expropriation of the public sphere stimulate the joining of the two faces of the pedagogy of public sociology -- that is linking projects within and outside the university. Moreover, precisely because third-wave marketization is a global phenomenon, public social science must also ascend to a global scale. Here we have much to learn from all manner of innovations in public education in different parts of the world, for example, from our colleagues, Alejandrina Reyes and Edenis Guilarte, who are here from the Experimental National University in Venezuela where they use the pedagogy of Paulo Freire to stitch together a more robust civil society. The balance between the two pedagogies of public sociology will vary from place to place, but they will need to move forward together if the university is to defend itself as a public, as opposed to an economic good.