



Seven years passed

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All that begins comes to an end

In this case, the contract as editor has ended. It is time for change. Therefore, it is also a good opportunity to jot down some ideas. Everyone knows that only at the end is the result known, that only at the end of the game do we know what the score was. If only the goals count, that is the most important part. But we also know that the end, the result, does not justify the means. The path, the process, the means also have their value. And in a parallel approach, only when the road has been travelled is it feasible to look back and describe the route. Before it was possible to anticipate and imagine how it could be. In that difference, in that hiatus between before and after, the seeds of what always overflows and transcends us are sown. We are, as humans, as individuals, small. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has shown us this. To the extent that we participate in shared projects, to the extent that we build with others, we can weave common stories capable of overcoming the limits of the present and of circumstances. Current Sociology Monographs (CSM) is one of those places where some of the publications¹ of the International Sociological Association (ISA) are deposited. There remain recorded different contributions for the future with which a part of contemporary sociological knowledge is constructed.

The calendar is relentless

‘They say that our nature changes every seven years’, Gracian wrote in 1647. This is part of the advice §276 published in *The Pocket Oracle and Art of Prudence*, where Baltasar Gracián (1601–1658) said,

Know how to renew your character using nature and art. They say that our nature changes every seven years: let this improve and enhance your taste. After the first seven years we gain the use of reason; let there be a new perfection with each successive period. Observe this natural process to help it along, and expect others to improve as well. Thus, many change their behaviour with their status or position, and sometimes this is not noticed until the full extent of such a change is apparent. At twenty, a person is a peacock; at thirty, a lion; at forty, a camel; at fifty, a snake; at sixty, a dog; at seventy, a monkey; and at eighty, nothing.²

From a current sociology perspective, it may seem superfluous to go back so many centuries and considering an author outside the sociological canon (Schneickert et al., 2019; Shalin, 2015), but it is not. I will try to explain. First, in this hyper-connected and digitalized time where artificial intelligence processes more information than any human being (Marcuello-Servós, 2023), it is worth remembering that knowledge, in general, and sociological knowledge, in particular, have different layers and forms. In the same way, it is convenient not to speak of science in the singular but of sciences in the plural. In any case, it is always a social construction. It does not float in the air, even if it is on the Internet or the digital Cloud. And, at the same time, as we well know, it intervenes in the social construction of reality. Gracian was also clear about this dynamic in his day. He knew and lived that words had effects on the world. He knew the social dynamics and the evolution of individuals in society have different sides, the most repeated being the distinction between ‘reality and appearance’ (§ 99). The challenge of discerning between what is and what seems, between facts and interpretations, between perceptions and their effects remains relevant (Thomas and Thomas, 1928).

Second, in these fast-paced and volatile times (Kotter et al., 2021) and extreme inequality (Chancel and Piketty, 2021), it remains pertinent to decipher the forms of power that constrain and alienate our lives. In these times of digitally amplified noises and polarization, it is opportune to recall the personal transit through stages that are always new for the individual and reiterative in social terms. That is why the role of the social sciences and sociology in the configuration of society is now a challenge that Sieyes (1748–1832) initiated in his time. As far as we know, he was the first to coin the term *sociologie*.³ And that is a merit. He was ahead of Comte (1798–1857). Although Sieyes certainly did not develop a sociology in the strict sense, he was looking for a way to comprehend and explain the society of his revolutionary epoch. Convulsive, violent times, where in the name of enlightened reason and in the name of liberty, equality and fraternity violence was the instrument to achieve power at any price. Just read Robespierre.⁴ Since then, many contributions, theories and discoveries have transformed the social order of this planet. And we still do not learn. Putin’s invasion of Ukraine and forms of structural violence in many other places on the planet continue to sow pain for many people.

Third, to observe ‘natural process’ – *variedad natural*, natural variety, in the original – is not so simple and easy. Perhaps it does not exist as such, in an ordered sense, and is only a human desire. Probably, natural order exists if you want to see it, even in cities (Hough, 1995). It is not possible to answer in a radical way, although it is evident that reality insists (Lacan, 1966) and resists to be explained in all its details. However, observing continues to be a challenge. Distinguishing the positions of the observed and the observer, of the observing system and the result of the observations, is as much as asking about the basis of the empirical foundation of sociological contributions. Objectivity, subjectivity and inter-subjectivity are characteristics linked to the way of knowing and explaining the world (Von Foerster, 2003). And that remains a problem. Just listen to the political justifications that legitimize dictators and autocrats such as Ortega, Kim Jong Un, Xi Jinping and Putin, Maduro, among others. In these contexts, not all words can be pronounced and not all verbs can be conjugated.

This is an old trend that keeps repeating itself. Those in power do not want questions and do not accept criticism. Remembering Humpty Dumpty,⁵ ‘a word means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less’. And Alice has nothing to criticize about ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things’. ‘The question is’, said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master that’s all’. Power, social control and meaning are always intertwined. This is an element that underlies prudence exercised in a critical manner. In a certain sense, current sociology is called to situate itself on the frontier of critical thinking both with the instituted social order and with its own way of exercising criticism and constructing meaning.

‘All in all, you’re just another brick in the wall’

From an optimistic and ironical point of view, it is worth remembering Pink Floyd’s verse. Every building needs the pieces, bricks, pillars and foundations that make it possible to build it. Sociology has been built by adding contributions of different dimensions and relevance. For more than a century, a corpus has been created in which to contrast the main contributions, authors and theories. When we are part of the past, if the libraries and journals archives are not lost, the next generations will be able to consult what was done and said in our current sociology, and all other ISA publications.

For the past 7 years, I have been editor of CSM and Sage book series *Studies in International Sociology* (SSIS). Both are well-established publications. In a certain sense, they function on their own. They have their own instituted dynamics, rhythm and procedures. However, nothing is guaranteed without the people who carry out the necessary tasks. There is an invisible collective that remains in the back room. They are the ones who hit the pedals and move the gears. Behind each printed page, in addition to its authors, there is an ongoing process of revision, design and production. The most important thing is to facilitate the processes. Learning how the system works is not intuitive. It takes time.

CSM and SSIS are spaces open to a complementary logic to that of scientific works produced individually. They have a cooperative and group work approach. In this sense, they have been a place to give space to this type of work. The list can be consulted directly on the web. It is not necessary to repeat it here.⁶ Collaboration with Research Committees (RCs) and National Associations (NAs) is an area to continue taking care of so that the different perspectives that give form to the ISA can continue to grow. There are still some barren spaces in which to propose new publications and encourage sociological reflection. There is still much sociology to be done. Much remains to be done to understand the social keys to eradicating war, violence and injustice. Moreover, much sociology is still needed to provide social keys to the challenges of climate change and ecological catastrophes. There are still margins for creativity and social and intellectual innovation . . . spaces for thinking and doing, to underpin emerging issues arising from the digitalization of society (López Peláez et al., 2022).

There is much sociology to be done to better explain the effects of technologies on our lives. Capitalism has mutated into its technologically modified form of data capitalism (Marcuello-Servós, 2022). It consolidates forms of surveillance and control, forms of alienation and submission, where individual attention and emotions feed the old

tendency to subjugate the other (Zuboff, 2019). It is up to us to anticipate responses before decisions are made by algorithms designed to learn by themselves. Artificial intelligence and other information and communication technologies (ICTs) have positive effects, opening new fields of human welfare. And as Bernard Scott suggests, paraphrasing a Chinese proverb, artificial intelligence and ICTs are an opportunity riding a dangerous wind.

It is up to us to maintain the legacy left to us by past generations and to support young people who are just starting out. We have consolidated a perverse system of impact indexes that does not help to do better research. It is up to us to explore forms of action, research and dissemination that allow us to do better sociology for a better humanity on a single planet. We are part of the solution. Surely, it is possible to look for alternatives to the cognitive empire (De Sousa Santos, 2019 [2018]) that feeds alienating logics of domination.

During these years, I have learned that CSM and SSIS are more than two publications, are two spaces to learn, share and support each other. I hope I have contributed to imagine and work for a better future for our association, the ISA and our planet. Everything comes, everything grows weary and everything ends. But it can also be said, there is still a long way to go, the sun continues to rise, it is worth continuing. There is still much to be done and imagined . . . And lots of surprises to be dealt with.

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Notes

1. All International Sociological Association (ISA) publications are available on the web: <https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/publications/isa-journals>
2. The quote is taken from Jeremy Robbins' English translation (Gracián, 2011).
3. Guilhaumou (2006: 117) wrote, 'In one of his unpublished manuscripts, which we can date from the 1780s, Sieyès coined the term sociology fifty years before Auguste Comte'.
4. At different moments, Robespierre defends the use of violence as a way to impose his revolutionary reason. One example suffices, the basis of popular government in times of peace is virtue, the basis of popular government during a revolution is both virtue and terror; virtue, without which terror is nefarious; terror, without which virtue is impotent. Terror is nothing but swift, severe and inflexible justice; it is, therefore, an emanation of virtue; it is less a principle in itself, than a consequence of the general principle of democracy, applied to the most urgent needs of the fatherland. (Robespierre, 1840: 550) This translation is my own.
5. Obviously, it is one of Lewis Carroll's characters in his book *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*.
6. Just a brief explanation. Take into account the 'inertia' in the production of monographs. The first of this period was Volume 66 Issue 4, July 2018, 'Global sociology of care and care work', although it was already approved of its first step. The 2024 volumes are now in process: Volume 72 Issue 2, March 2024: 'Patterns of creative action and cultural change' and Volume 72 Issue 4, July 2024: 'Social impact assessment: New pathways for applied social research in the face of contemporary global challenges'.

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