Rethinking 'Current Crisis' Arguments: Gouldner and the Legacy of Critical Sociology

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Abstract

Proclamations of 'current crisis' in sociology are long-standing and have recently resurfaced in Britian and North America. This article explores the response of Alvin Gouldner to an earlier 1970s perceived 'current crisis'. It then discusses some of the key dimensions ascribed to the current 'current crisis' – fragmentation, the decline of the intellectual, the need for a higher profile for public and professional sociology - to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Gouldner's ideas for analysing the situation of contemporary sociology. It concludes that Gouldner's critical sociology provides a useful basis for understanding current debates about fragmentation and public sociology, but less so in explaining the decline of intellectuals. In addition, neither Gouldner nor contemporary thinking about sociology's present-day 'current crisis' give much attention to the vastly increased regulation and bureaucratisation of the university system accompanying the expended remit of regulatory government, something we think underlies the discipline's successive perceptions of crisis. The contemporary version of critical sociology, with which this article aligns itself, provides a more structural and less voluntaristic rethinking of 'current crisis' arguments.

Introduction

> 'In the midst of these pervasive perceptions of crisis it is not surprising to find social thought itself to be diagnosed as crisis-ridden… This concept resounds with all-embracing yet diffuse allusions to some multi-faceted yet unitary phenomenon, without the need to classify exactly what is meant' (Holton, 1987: 503)

1.1 Reflections on and critiques of the state of the sociological enterprise are long-standing, and as Holton (1987) suggests, are often rather imprecise in nature. However, 'crisis' has been a recurrent metaphor for thinking about the discipline and changes occurring within it. Thus in 1932, writing on intellectuals for the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* , Michels characterised sociology as 'largely demoralized' and undergoing 'an intense spiritual self-criticism' (Michels, 1932: 123-24). Then, forty years later, Merton commented that 'Sociology has typically been in an unstable state, alternating between planes of extravagant optimism and extravagant pessimism…' (Merton, 1975: 22). Through the 1990s and across the millennium years, repeated concerns were expressed about the discipline's decline (including Turner and Turner, 1990; Horowitz, 1993; *Sociological Forum*, 1994; Cole, 2001; Berger, 2002). The 2005 sub-title of the convention theme for the American Sociological Association 100th Annual Meeting was 'Accounting for the Rising and Declining Significance of Sociology'.[1] There has been an associated high profile debate around the future of the discipline in connection with 'public sociology' (see Burawoy, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, Burawoy et al, 2005; also Acker, 2005; Aronowitz, 2005; Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2005; Urry, 2005a; with Burawoy 2005c a rejoinder), including in a special issue of *Sociology* (41.5, 2007). The debate has also featured in this journal, with Scott (2005a) discussing the negative effects he perceives fragmentation and specialization have had on UK sociology and argues the need for a recognised core of professional sociology.[2] Here a rejoinder from Urry (2005b) emphasises that sociology has to respond to the fluid character of present-day mobilities and the existence of social life in a sense without 'society' as classically conceived, while another from Stanley (2005) points out that sociology has always had its 'others' and permeable borders, and that many of its now canonical theories and methodologies have

resulted from this 'othering'.

1.2 However, perhaps the most influential articulation of a 'crisis' in sociology is that made by Alvin Gouldner, notably in *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* but developed across other publications as well (including Gouldner, 1970, 1973, 1979, 1985), adding up to a strongly expressed argument about the then-state of sociology and its relation to society and government.[3] Some current discussions of crisis, fragmentation and the public role of sociologists have alluded to Gouldner's 1970s intervention (Burawoy, 2005a; Stanley, 2000, 2005; Ossewaarde, 2007), and his critique of professional sociology and attempt to formulate a more reflexive and critical sociological approach remain relevant to contemporary debate. However, paradoxically given that the current 'current crisis' in sociology has been formulated as a problem of diversity and fragmentation, Gouldner's 'crisis' was premised on the opposite view, that the discipline had become too monolithic, accompanied by a lack of reflexivity with respect to its theories, methods and the research relationship, and a failure to engage with the changing world around it: 'Rather than a call for criticism, the watchword of professionalized sociology became: continuity, codification, convergence and culmination' (Gouldner, 1970: 17).

1.3 Gouldner's work links the ideas about crisis proclaimed by successive cohorts of sociologists and are useful in unravelling Holton's (1987:503) 'need to classify exactly what is meant' by crisis. We begin this unravelling by discussing Gouldner's analysis of the sociological crisis of the 1960s and 70s and his proposed critical and reflexive solutions, including the ways in which these have been taken up in and around sociology and its borders. We then explore the strengths and limitations of his thinking for making sense of some interrelated aspects of current thinking about sociology's perceived crisis, concerning fragmentation, the role of intellectuals and the debate about public sociology, and we also discuss the absence of a more structural element to the debate, regarding the vastly increased governmental regulation and bureaucratisation occurring hand-in-hand with increased social mobilities. Overall, rather than being in crisis in the *in extremis* sense, we conclude that sociology, like other disciplines and the university system as a whole, faces a number of important changes and challenges and is struggling to respond to these analytically. Gouldner's work, we suggest, provides still helpful ideas which can be built on in developing a thoughtful critical sociological response to the present-day situation. This is not least because it does not presume that change and diversity = decline, as is implicit in some 'current crisis' arguments, although other contemporary 'crisis' positions are more in keeping with Gouldner's attempt to produce a sociology for the times, as they situate crisis around an ontological argument about changing social formations and vastly increased mobilities, rather than advancing an epistemological argument about the decline or loss of sociological expertise and standing.

Gouldner and the 'coming crisis' of sociology

2.1 Burawoy has suggested that 'critical sociology is the conscience of professional sociology', seeing Gouldner together with Robert Lynd, C. Wright Mills and Pitirim Sorokin as critical sociologists who 'questioned the moral foundations of existing professional sociology… A flourishing professional sociology always has to find space for such critical engagement… it is this reflexivity that makes sociology an intellectual as well as a professional enterprise' (Burawoy, 2004: 1609).[4] In such distinguished albeit resolutely male company, specifying pre-eminence courts counterclaims. But what is certain is Gouldner's rightful inclusion here, because of his commitment to a critical sociology which included reflexivity and auto-critique, and the long-lasting influence of his ideas about the moral basis of sociology and its relationship to society. And rather than just being helpful in looking back at the discipline forty years ago, his work provides some important tools for considering the *present* debate. Located as it was at the crossroads of the transition of sociology from an older rather conservative and settled order, to the diversity of the discipline today, it struggles to analyse and explain emerging trends that have now become more stable patterns (Ossewaarde, 2007).

2.2 Across a range of publications, Gouldner (1970; 1973; 1979; 1985) carried out a coherent project concerning the state of the discipline, encompassing his distinctive take on the sociology of knowledge, ideas about the theory/ideology/method nexus, and the sociology-society relationship. Gouldner's specific argument about 'crisis' in sociology has been much rehearsed, but with its implications for the discipline less well thought through (although see Johnson, 1989; Eldridge et al, 2000). His argument, developed particularly in *The Coming Crisis*…, was that in sociology of the 1960s and early 70s theoretical perspectives were converging, leading to a rather tired status quo situation in a discipline increasingly divorced from political happenings and social change both inside and outside of academia (Gouldner, 1970: 3-19). He further argued that, because of the influence of methodological dualism and theoretical orthodoxy, professional sociology was becoming increasingly technocratic and subservient to the state in terms of its funding, methodological principles and practices, and the types of research conducted (Gouldner, 1970: 20-60). In *For Sociology*, Gouldner also linked theory and research to sociological ethics and moral commitment, commenting emotively that: 'If we today concern ourselves exclusively with the technical

proficiency of our students and reject all responsibility for their moral sense, or lack of it, then we may some day be compelled to accept responsibility for having trained a generation willing to serve in another Auschwitz' (Gouldner, 1973: 25).

2.3 Gouldner's solutions to the crisis are interestingly discussed in the ideas concerning reflexive and critical sociology developed in the epilogue to *The Coming Crisis…*. The first aspect of this is his call for a reflexive sociology, a sociology of sociology which would interrogate the production of theory and argue for a methodological monism to banish the subject-object binary and focus on the processes of knowledge production as relational. This is less of a blueprint to follow or a proclamation of would-be orthodoxy, and more a set of general principals to work with and from, and it remains a watchword for much of contemporary sociology. The second aspect is Gouldner's call for a critical sociology, one that will engage with a quickly changing world. This is importantly related to his call that sociology could and should collaborate with social movements and the world 'out there', and also to him founding *Theory and Society* (Gouldner, 1974), leading him to both a strong sense of sociology and its core, but also a responsiveness to its borders and 'others'.

2.4 Gouldner's critical sociology proceeds from the assumption that the sociological project is constitutionally bound up with society. Boudon's early arguments about the current 'current crisis' distinguishes between critical sociology of a Frankfurt School kind and closely allied to Gouldner's, and one that identifies the crisis in terms of the perceived threat to a properly scientific epistemology for sociology which will be objective and detached from moral commitments as well as partisanship (Boudon 1980: 1-12; see also Goldthorpe 2000). Gouldner's critical sociology instead advances a thorough-going ontological approach, understanding epistemology in ontological terms and relating it to the composition of the body politic and its prevailing canonical ideas, methodologies and persons; one of the prime reasons for the vehement critical response to *The Coming Crisis…* from the commanding heights of the discipline, and the equally passionate positive ones from the 'others' of 1970s sociology.

2.5 Gouldner's ideas about reflexivity are central to his conception of critical sociology. For Gouldner, reflexivity involved sociologists gaining an analytical purchase on the social context and utility of their theories and knowledge-claims. Many sociologists will perhaps be more familiar with the term as used by Giddens (1991) to refer to an individualist mental outlook which he sees as characteristic of the late-modern subject in pursuit of their life-project, or by Archer (2007) as the internal conversations people have in making sense of the world and gauging how to conduct themselves in it. However, Gouldner's version of reflexivity is a much more social and shared one, with the inter-personal and interactional notion of reflexivity that underpins at least one strand of feminist sociology (Smith, 1987; Stanley and Wise, 1993) having much in common with Gouldner's thinking.

2.6 Of course we recognize the difficulties in assessing the significance of a single sociologist's *oeuvre* for a discipline (and beyond), particularly across national boundaries, not least because significance, like beauty, often resides in the eye of the beholder. Thus while the general thrust of Gouldner's ideas have helped transform sociology, some aspects of his thinking may be viewed as time-bound, or even with hindsight, incorrect. For example, while many sociologists would accept much of the critical sociology project argued in *The Coming Crisis…* and related publications, and some have explicitly identified themselves with these aspects of Gouldner's thinking (O'Neill, 1972), others have seen such ideas as part of the problem with the discipline (Horowitz, 1993; Berger, 2002). Also Gouldner's general critique of American sociology in the 1960s and 70s is inevitably somewhat context- and time-bound, and also some commentators have emphasised the decreasing intellectual relevance of Gouldner's work in the 1990s and beyond (Turner and Turner, 1990; Cole, 2001), with it being Mills rather than Gouldner whose work is more celebrated in sociology today (eg. Mills, 1959; Brewer, 2004; Lemert, 2007). Additionally, his critical sociology legacy has had to respond to challenges from feminism (Smith, 1987 amongst many others), postmodern theory (Siedman, 1994; Calhoun, 1995), the discipline's characterisation as interdisciplinary scavenging (Rojeck & Turner, 2000; Urry, 2005b), and the rise of what McLennan (2000) has termed the 'new positivity'.

2.7 At the same time, the heritage of Gouldner's ideas still underpins the articulation of contemporary critical sociology (see Beuchler, 2008). His legacy is very much a present part of sociology - although in perhaps more diffuse ways than formerly, through the journal he founded, *Theory and Society* - in retrospective analyses assessing his impact on the discipline (Pedraza, 2002; Levesque-Lopman, 1989; Johnson, 1989), and as an important influence on Burawoy's (2004; 2005) public sociology ideas. In the UK, papers from the 1999 BSA conference were published in a volume entitled *For Sociology* (Eldridge et al, 2000), with his work widely discussed in UK and European sociology around the politics of research (Hammersley, 1995; Hammersley & Gomm, 1997) and reflexivity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; May, 1999; Latour, 1988; Woolgar, 1998). Gouldner's influence has been particularly pervasive, although perhaps less well acknowledged, in discussions of the reflexive processes of sociological research (early examples are

Bell & Newby, 1977; Bell & Encel, 1978; Bell & Roberts, 1984; Punch, 1986; see also Coffey, 1999; Devine & Heath, 1999; Bulmer, 2005).

2.8 In Gouldner's view, neither theory nor methodology are arrived at neutrally but are closely tied to the discipline's domain assumptions, as well as the sentiments, personal realities and ideologies of sociologists themselves (Gouldner, 1970: 29-51). There are important moral, ethical and political issues at stake here and, rather than ignore or attempt to neutralize them, his view was that sociologists had to face up to what these influences actually meant for the discipline as a whole as well as for them as individuals. Relatedly, in opposition to some well-known radical colleagues (Becker, 1967), Gouldner rejected an advocacy-oriented 'which side are you on' approach (Gouldner, 1973: 27-68). In his view, partisan and ideological adherence to a specific set of ideas and beliefs, while understandable, had to be countered by the moral and ethical stance he termed sociological commitment. Knowledge-claims, in Gouldner's view, should not simply involve taking sides or insisting on the rightness of a pre-determined position, but need to be sociologically credible and politically transformative at the same time.

2.9 In his discussion of 'theory and ideology' (Gouldner, 1973: 82-127), Gouldner argues that those theorists who work "with" political movements have a distinct advantage over those who do not, but emphasising collaboration and sociological commitment from the theorist rather than partisanship and the subordination of theory to ideology. The role Gouldner accords the theorist is one of extending debate and aiding rationale discourse and so furthering the possibility of human emancipation, not of subordinating theory to the politics of an organisation or party. As he argues: 'The relations between theorists, on the one hand, and movements or parties, on the other, should be governed by the principle that each is autonomous of the other organizationally, but collaborate on the basis of their common commitment to human emancipation' (Gouldner, 1973: 107).

2.10 Gouldner has a distinctive approach to methodology too. For him, methodology is neither just a theoretically-generated device, nor a neutral technocratic technique, but rather a process containing its own domain assumptions, just as theory does. Unlike much of the conventional wisdom of his day, that empiricism was 'purely a technical concern devoid of ideology', Gouldner argued that empiricism actually represented a growing instrumentalism of placidly servicing the welfare state and making sociologists akin to market researchers (Gouldner, 1970: 445). As he aptly points out: 'Every research method makes some assumptions about how information may be secured from people and what may be done with people, or to them, in order to secure it…' (Gouldner, 1970: 50). Further, Gouldner argues that the assumption of methodological dualism artificially separates the sociologist from the layperson, resulting in false notions of detachment and an underlying 'fear of self' (Gouldner, 1970: 496). Succinctly, the separation of method from the sociologist employing it is an ideology which denies the fundamentally interactive and interpretational processes of knowledge-production.

2.11 It is around the borders of sociology that Gouldner's ideas about critical sociology and analytical reflexivity have been most influential, yet also under-acknowledged. For instance, the origins of cultural studies (Hall, 1980; Hall and Whannel, 1965; Williams, 1961) developed alongside Gouldner's 'coming crisis' argument and has subsequently concerned itself with many issues raised by him, like the state of the discipline, cultural politics, developing critical ethnographies and exploring analytical reflexivity in research relations (Johnson, 1983; Hollands, 1984; McGuigan, 1992; Willis, 2000). In addition, some versions of feminist sociology drew on Gouldner's ideas about reflexivity within a critical sociology project in problematising (male) grand theory and abstracted empiricism, debating the relationship between theory and social movements, and exploring reflexivity in the research process (Roberts, 1981; Stanley and Wise, 1983; Smith, 1987; Fonow and Cook, 1991).

2.12 For some, cultural studies was perceived as a way out of sociology's crisis as described by Gouldner (Hall, 1980). Unafraid of interdisciplinary ideas, its attempt to connect theory and politics, and mixing of colourful reflexive ethnographies with big ideas and important social problems, meant that cultural studies was a natural home for critical and reflexive sociologists tired of the old orthodoxies and methods (Johnson, 1983; Willis, 1980). Debates within feminism were also influential in cultural studies, particularly with regard to addressing issues of power, research relations and knowledge-production (McRobbie, 1980; CCCS Women's Group, 1981), as were issues of race/ nationality (Race and Politics Group, 1981) and class/age (Hall et al, 1976). Methodologically, there was a call for more reflexive research relations (Willis, 1980), particularly around the development of what Hammersley (1992: 96) later referred to as "critical ethnography", defined as a form of qualitative research that contrasts with more traditional approaches in being organically linked to new left or feminist politics. Like Gouldner's reflexive sociology, such work sought to make explicit the relationship between the researcher and researched, exposing the social relations of fieldwork (Hollands, 2003) and suggesting that such a relationship was a starting point for fusing theory and action, politics with academia (Willis, 1980; Hollands, 1984).

2.13 Regarding feminist sociology, despite the rather masculinist inflection of Gouldner's comment in *The*

Coming Crisis…, that a radical, reflexive sociology 'would recognise that knowledge of the world cannot be advanced apart from the sociologist's knowledge of himself [sic], and his position in the social world, or apart from his efforts to change them' (Gouldner, 1970: 489), his arguments have had considerable impact on those seeking to break free from the theoretical orthodoxy and methodological dualism of conventional sociology. Whilst crafting a feminist sociology clearly drew on many writers, theories and ideas about the linkage between sociology and social movements (Delamont, 2003), Gouldner's ideas were important if somewhat hidden, although the influence of his work has been more fully acknowledged in in-hindsight reflections (eg. Stanley, 1990, 2000). It was not, however, the auto-critique aspects of Gouldner's critical sociology that influenced feminist sociologists so much, having their own critique of malestream conventional sociology, but rather the more analytical aspects of his ideas about reflexivity in relation to the production of ideas and knowledge. What appeared most promising for feminist sociology was Gouldner's ability to think coterminously about reflexivity 'in here', concerning the production of knowledge within the discipline, and critical sociology 'out there', in empirically investigating social life, and his conceiving these as autonomous yet symbiotically-related spheres (Wise and Stanley, 2003).

2.14 The transmutation of Gouldner's concerns both inside and on the borders of sociology demonstrates the adaptability of sound intellectual ideas. Of course, once cutting-edge theory can later be seen as part of the old order. But the best ideas - and we include elements of Gouldner's work here – endure because they remain directly relevant and encourage hard thinking about the current context. Two examples regarding Gouldner's work are worth noting. In cultural studies, the influence of Gouldner's ideas translated into promoting a close relationship between academic ideas and popular cultural ones (McGuigan, 1992), as well as the continuing recognition that methodology is both part of a process and a condition for a certain kind of knowledge production, with credibility and accountability coming from being explicit about the conditions of knowledge production, not from scientific notions of objectivity (Willis, 2000; also see the journal *Ethnography*). In feminist sociology, reflexive sociology was re-fashioned to inform some of the main dimensions of feminist praxis, in particular in formulating ideas about analytical reflexivity as a means of grounding arguments and knowledge-claims (Fonow and Cook, 1991; Smith, 1987; Stanley, 1990; Stanley and Wise, 1993; Levesque-Lopman, 1989). Here broader feminist ideas about moral epistemology were reworked and connected with Gouldner's ideas about moral sociology, one that was engaged and committed to a better and more just society as well as a better and more just sociology.

2.15 Gouldner's sociological work adds up to an interesting and still relevant project, the construction and promotion of a critical sociology with not only a sound conceptual base but also a set of methodological tools, including an analytical reflexivity that encourages not only reflection but also the accountability of ideas and knowledge-claims, and also a strong commitment, not to partisanship but to moral accountability. Its key points of analytic focus included disciplinary formations, the grounding and construction of knowledge, the role of intellectuals and the post-1945 rise of a new class, and it had immediate both positive (including on both of us) and negative (particularly in connection with the critique of sociology offered in *The Coming Crisis...*) impact. While critical sociology does not exist as, for example, a distinct theoretical perspective or methodology, it *has* become part of the mind-frame of the discipline, codifying and extending pre-existing analytical ideas. In this diffuse sense, its legacy is one which impacts on all sociologists, at least in the English-speaking and -writing parts of the world, because it is one of the components of how being a sociologist is conceived. The question then arises as to whether and to what extent a Gouldnerian critical sociology can provide a useful means of analysing present-day 'current crisis' arguments about sociology, and in what respects it needs updating, extending or revising.

The legacy of critical sociology

3.1 What we now explore is, not whether Gouldner's specific ideas about the then-crisis in sociology and his proposed solutions were right or wrong, but whether his general approach continues to provide a useful way to think about the discipline now and its current perceptions of crisis. How, in what ways and with what limitations do the conceptual, theoretical, methodological, political and ethical tools provided by Gouldner's critical sociology project offer insights and strategies for a contemporary critical sociology take on these matters? We explore such questions in relation to important aspects of current 'current crisis' arguments: the view that sociology is increasingly fragmented, contributing to its (numerical, also intellectual) decline; the view that the intellectual position of sociologists as producers of expert knowledge is under challenge or has been displaced; the need to reconfigure the discipline in a public sociology direction in response; and the more far-reaching argument that mobilities have dissolved structures and society as sociology has traditionally conceptualised them, creating an ontological problematic fundamentally challenging to the discipline.

3.2 We start with the latter argument and by considering the 'case for the prosecution' in a strong form. Is it the case that each generation or cohort's crisis is contextually specific and distinct and there is no equivalence between the crisis as Gouldner perceived it and as at least some sociologists today do?

Underpinning this argument is interesting work which has re-conceived sociology 'beyond societies' and promoted a postdisciplinary stance in relation to contemporary mobilities, networks and flows (see, for instance, Castells, 2000a, 2000b; Esping-Andersen, 2000; Law and Urry, 2004; Sayer, 2000; Urry, 1981, 2000a, 2000b; Wallerstein, 1999). However, while we take the point about the changing character of society and social relations, the proponents of these arguments do not seem to us to be suggesting that there is no social order, no social structures, no governments nor states, but instead that these now take new mobile forms, an ontological argument about the need for sociology to reconfigure its analytical 'gaze' with which we largely agree. Such arguments do not vitiate critical sociology - indeed, for us they exemplify it; and nor do they make the key tools of Gouldner's solution, reflexivity and a critical sociology of sociology's knowledge-production and knowledge-claims, redundant.

3.3 Gouldner's critical sociology approach contributed to loosening its borders in various direct and indirect ways, one of which was by lending support for the increased diversity of ideas and approaches, and more indirectly of people, in the discipline. As Burawoy (2005b: 317) argues of 1970s US sociology, 'The successor generation, weaned on critical sociology, held sway, embraced democratic decentralisation, widened the doors to minority groups, deepened participation, and set about creating alternative sociologies', and there was a similar pattern of diversification in sociology in the UK over the same period (Payne et al, 1981). Ironically, it is this greater diversity that underpins one aspect of the present 'current crisis' arguments. Thus some sociologists, in the US in particular, have been quick to draw a direct link between the numerical decline of the discipline's student-base and increased diversity, and claims of fragmentation and decomposition (eg. Horowitz, 1993). It is notable that these arguments tend to remain generalised and prophetic and rarely investigate the actual facts. They also often conflate changes in the student base (a 'local' matter about numbers, which are not always about decline but the more nebulous claim of slipping 'standards', and anyway by no means characterise all national sociologies, with some experiencing large increases), diversification in the body of professional sociologists (particularly regarding the ingress of women and people of colour, and the growth of new less traditional universities), and the diversification of ideas, perspectives and methodologies (with attendant implications for the displacement of once canonical topics, methods and persons). At the heart of these is change rather than necessarily either fragmentation or decline, and change which is considerably wider than just the discipline of sociology, indeed considerably wider than just the university system.

3.4 *The Coming Crisis…*argues a position generally supportive of a close relationship between sociology and political and social movements, and thus of the development of a radical as well as critical sociology. Burawoy (2005b: 313) comments, concerning radical sociology of the 1970s, that 'For all its radicalism its immediate object was the transformation of sociology not of society'. However, this is not entirely true in Gouldner's case. In arguing for changing the old canonical order in sociology in *The Coming Crisis…*, Gouldner gives less attention to how to make practical links to the political world outside of the academy; but he certainly takes this up in detail in *For Sociology* when discussing 'theory and ideology' (eg. Gouldner, 1973: 82-127), while in his later work he develops some of these ideas in his 'intellectuals as a new class' thesis and further comments on the role of theory and theorists in arguing *Against Fragmentation* (Gouldner, 1979, 1985).

3.5 There is much of continuing interest here, particularly regarding Gouldner's formulation of a politically motivated and morally committed yet non-partisan sociology. However, for instance in discussing theory and ideology (Gouldner, 1973: 82-127), Gouldner's examples all concern Marxist and class-based movements and ignore other political formations. There is, indeed, a curious failure to 'see' the black, women and gay movements which were already then active and on the rise, with deleterious consequences for the long-term utility of his analysis. This is not to suggest that various of Gouldner's ideas cannot be used to think about these movements or that they cannot be adapted by sociological members of them, but to recognise there are significant differences between the role that intellectuals might provide in relation to class-based *political parties*, and those they might have in relation to relatively open if nonetheless controlling *forms of governmentality* (as in Blair's Britiain or perhaps Obama's US) or in relation to *social formations* like the women's, black, gay or ecology movements, with both of the latter absent from his conceptual and analytical framework. In addition, Gouldner's thinking about reflexivity, while helpfully stressing an analytical rather than a personal-emotional view of it, remains rather general and does not seriously explore the range of analytical positions that sociologists/intellectuals might take up. Certainly, not being prescriptive can be enabling, but it is what he fails to see here that with hindsight we conclude is important. In particular, Gouldner's vision of critical sociology '…did not include an explicitly gendered reflexivity that addressed the role of male sociological persons in bolstering the patriarchal status quo' (Witz et al, 2000:4).

3.6 However, while Gouldner was a white heterosexual male outsider in a discipline then dominated by such, his emphasis on analytical reflexivity as a means for the sociologist to deepen '…awareness, of who and what he [sic] is, in a specific society at a given time, and of how both his social role and his personal

praxis affect his work as a sociologist' (Gouldner, 1970: 494) transcends the masculinism of his language. His approach to reflexivity can in fact be re-fashioned and developed regarding the practitioners of 'other' sociologies (i.e. black, feminist etc), but it still needs to be recognised that his writings do not even acknowledge, let alone explore, the possibility of these as analytical locations *within* sociology, despite the fact that members of these social movements were not only campaigning outside the gates of the university at the time, but inside them too.

3.7 Equally notable, Gouldner's (1979) extended 'intellectuals as a new class' thesis failed to pin down politics beyond parties, notwithstanding the politicisation of academia, the increasing regulation over time of the university system by governmental bureaucracy, and the fact that academics, sociologists among them, were in process of becoming a more diverse collectivity of 'others' (Urry, 2005b; Stanley, 2005) rather than a homogeneous set of class actors, as he predicted. In *The Future of Intellectuals…*, Gouldner tries to make sense of 'current crisis' arguments by reference to wider debates about the 'decline of intellectuals'. For him, the 'new class of intellectuals' was to be one of the key players in achieving social transformation. Rather than acting as a benevolent liberalising elite or an exploitative class fraction, the new class for Gouldner had its own interests but was also a fractured general class and so capable of developing policies and practices transcending its particular interests. However, as Anthony Giddens has commented, Gouldner's argument conflates a technical intelligentsia and bureaucracy, with intellectuals as such; and it also overstates the commitment of both to cultural politics and social change. Giddens' conclusion, that while Gouldner's analysis of intellectuals ought to be a strong element in his later work, 'far from being the case Gouldner's account of the role of intellectuals in modern societies is almost embarrassingly weak' (Giddens, 1987: 271), is a fair one.

3.8 Gouldner's (1979) 'new class thesis' not only failed to anticipate the massive extension of state regulation and the accompanying bureaucratisation of sociology (Vaughan et al, 1993; Morgan, 1997), but also failed to grasp that the new intellectual class was diversifying and largely unable to resist these processes. Ironically, the development of critical sociology and an increased diversity of sociologists and publics occurred over the same period as the increased bureaucratisation of universities and the deskilling and dis-empowering of the intelligentsia (Posner, 2001). Unravelling these twin processes leads to some very different conclusions about intellectuals as a new class *and* notions of sociological decline due to diversity. The opening up of alternative and hybridic sociologies has developed hand in hand with increased professionalisation and bureaucratisation in the discipline (Vaughan et al, 1993), not to mention a general decline in the role of public intellectuals (Posner, 2001), and it has been the former rather than the latter trends that crisis theorists have tended to emphasise (eg. Horowitz, 1993). However, in our view underpinning both are far wider structural changes together with an associated massive expansion of the university system post-1945, occurring in educational, political but particularly economic systems, rather than having their source in the discipline itself.

3.9 Jacoby (1987) has critiqued the modern university for turning intellectuals into soulless academics with restrictive vision, while Posner (2001) relatedly suggests that specialised knowledge has become simply a commodity in a marketplace with little quality control. Furedi (2004) similarly argues that society now is less hospitable to complex challenging ideas, proposing that postmodernism, a new breed of 'knowledge entrepreneur' and populist attacks on elitism are to blame for the decline of the intellectual in modern life. Whilst these are pertinent observations (see also Kurzman and Owens, 2002), such developments have taken place in the context of massive bureaucratisation generated by state and market regulatory processes that have come to govern university and intellectual life, including sociology (Philo and Miller, 2001; Vaughan1993). It is in this context that Savage and Burrows (2007) focus on changing governmentality within contemporary capitalism and its absorption of technical expertise in explaining the changing relationship between sociology and knowledge production. Such changes have occurred rapidly from the late 1970s onward and for us underpin some of the more specific comments by Jacoby, Posner, and Furedi, and they support a structural interpretation of current 'current crisis' arguments about intellectuals, universities and more specifically the discipline of sociology, rather than the overly-voluntaristic 'they've been let in and have spoiled it' ones that tend to predominate.

3.10 Our argument here echoes Collins' (1986) proposal that it is important to separate out the institutional level of crisis arguments from the intellectual (or perhaps emotional) level, but it more strongly emphasises the need to actually research and analyse what is happening at the institutional level, rather than make emotive assumptions about perceived consequences. In addition, Gouldner did not foresee the kinds of change to which Jacoby, Furedi and others have drawn attention, and here we think he perhaps saw change as in general a 'good thing' and could not anticipate a situation in which resistance to change might be the most appropriate course of action. A similar modernist hopefulness characterises Burawoy's (2004, (2005a, (2005b, (2005c; Burawoy et al, 2005) recent discussions of public sociology,[5] which provide another perspective on 'current crisis' argument although reversing some of Gouldner's assessments. For example, unlike Gouldner's contention that 1960s US sociology was lagging behind the society it was seeking to

comprehend, Burawoy (2004) argues that sociology in the last thirty years has re-organised itself through its uptake of critical and radical sociology (partly attributable to Gouldner's influence), with this diversity having created the conditions for conversations with multiple public audiences and hence increased the relevance of the discipline. Thus the 'problem' as Burawoy (2005a) sees it is not necessarily one of decline, but rather of sociology insufficiently engaging with society because of the underdevelopment of public sociology.

3.11 We would argue for the centrality of critical sociology here, but Burawoy instead contends that 'our disciplinary project cannot and should not be reduced to a *critical sociology*, which makes no sense without a *professional sociology* to criticize…' (Burawoy, 2005b: 318). However, as Gouldner (1970: 17; 342-51) noted in *The Coming Crisis*…, the then-dominant version of professional sociology actively desired government regulation in the shaping of the discipline and its claims to expertise, through indirect funding mechanisms as well as direct audit ones, as part of its project of promoting sociology as providing technical conceptions of and solutions to state-perceived social problems. And contemporaneously something similar can be observed, that while society has changed and education and technical expertise strongly characterise the 'knowing' apparatus of contemporary capitalism (Thrift, 2005; Savage and Burrows, 2007), calls to promote public sociology hark back to an earlier period – that critiqued by Gouldner – when wartime governmental expansion employed and to an important extent incorporated the technical competencies of professional and public sociology. Interestingly, Gouldner's own 'new class of intellectuals' thesis blunted his recognition of such future consequences of the expanding remit of government and all that has accompanied this. Gouldner's analysis here perhaps prevented him from perceiving that the growth of critical sociology and diversity might coexist with a truncation of the actively critical function of sociology, with the race for research money, increased publications, more relevant and scientific methods, and career promotion, impeding the development of critical ideas and 'risky' research.

3.12 Burawoy (2005b) suggests that it is productive that different versions of sociology now co-exist with professional and public sociologies at the apex. However, we are struck that the bureaucratisation and regulation of the discipline has largely escaped his attention and is generally largely ignored in 'current crisis' arguments. In Burawoy's case, we think this results from him reducing critical sociology to auto-critique and a sociology of sociology (Burawoy, 2005b). This begs the question of whether it was the configuration of sociology that was Gouldner's prime concern in *The Coming Crisis…,* as Burawoy sees it, or instead whether this was the relationship *sociology had to society,* which is how we read it. For us, Gouldner's critical sociology provides a way of thinking about the connections between sociologists and the various publics they study, which recognises hierarchies and inequalities in society (even if Gouldner largely focused on class forms) whilst also maintaining a moral, ethical, non-partisan stance and a critical appreciation of theory and methodology. Critical sociology brings these things together and includes a much wider set of concerns than just sociological auto-critique. As we commented earlier, we see its contemporary form as a frame of mind, one which characterises a dimension of most sociological perspectives. Thus rather than perceiving sociology around the separate divisions that Burawoy discusses, we view these as combined in how most sociologists work. Separating them out as contending areas is not only artificial but also, albeit unintentionally, lends support to the idea that fragmentation equals the decline of professional sociology.

3.13 There are, moreover, equally plausible counter-interpretations of othering and hybridity as having strengthened sociology (Urry, 2005b), and concerning the intellectually beneficial influence of feminist sociology and gender studies (Stanley, 2005), noted earlier. In this regard, Aronowitz (2005) has called for greater interdisciplinarity in the social sciences and 'blurring the boundaries', while, as pointed out earlier, Castells (2000), Urry (2000; 2005a, 2005b) and others have argued that sociological analysis must move beyond the notion of a territorially-bounded society because of the impact of mobility, globalisation and world interdependence on social formations. Rather than being threats to the discipline, these developments should be viewed as central to the re-configuration of a renewed and reinvigorated sociology for the twenty-first century. Contemporary critical sociology, we proposed earlier, is more a frame of mind rather than a 'perspective' and forms a dimension of the work of many sociologists. Critical and analytical thinking about the relationship between sociology and society – a central component of Gouldner's work - has become an ingrained sociological practice, and the sociology of mobilities, the feminist project and other sociological attempts to think 'outside the box' are very much in the same spirit.

Conclusion

4.1 Cries of crisis, as noted at the start of this discussion, are recurrent in sociology; and we have proposed that these are largely the product of structural changes in society and also more recently of clashes between outgoing and incoming age cohorts within the discipline. While there are clearly challenges and changes confronting contemporary sociology and although Gouldner's critical sociology was a response to a real 1940s to 70s crisis, we are not convinced that talk of crisis today is necessarily

helpful or accurate. Rather, we have argued that – paradoxically and ironically – sociology as a discipline founded to conceptualise and explain change has recurrently, in each generation or cohort since at least the 1930s, responded to changes within itself and to its position within the academy, not with empirical investigation or structural analysis, but through what Holton (1987: 503) calls 'diffuse allusions'. Whether change and challenge or crisis terminology is used, it is rare that 'current crisis' arguments pin down the specifics of exactly what this consists of (Morgan, 1997). And while Gouldner's work, as indicated, has weaknesses and elisions as well as strengths, it remains one of the very few sustained in-depth sociological attempts to do this, and the far-sightedness of his project should be acknowledged.

4.2 We have explored the longer-term impact of Gouldner's work and pointed out that it recognised and insightfully responded to the currents of change, although the class-based nature of his conceptualisation of social movements and intellectuals as a new class hampered his analysis and prevented him from perceiving the wider currents of change then underway. Nonetheless his formulation of critical sociology has helped to transform the nature of the discipline and its relationship with its borders and sheds interesting light on current 'current crisis of sociology' arguments as well as those of the 1970s. Reflexive sociology is by nature open to self-critique and internal modification (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), and the present task of critical sociology as we see it is to develop the conceptual and methodological tools formulated by Gouldner in ways appropriate for present-day circumstances. Like Gouldner, we see critical sociology as not only an auto-critique of sociology, but also as an open responsive mechanism in the discipline for responding to wider changes and developments in the university system, intellectual life and society more generally. It is to a renewed critical sociology that sociology should look as a means for analysing current changes in the discipline and in the wider world.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] The conference was on 'Comparative Perspectives, Competing Explanations: Accounting for the Rising and Declining Significance of Sociology'.

[2] For responses, see Daventian, 2005; Urry, 2005b and Stanley, 2005 and the reply by Scott, 2005b.

[3] For the mixed responses to The Coming Crisis..., see Peterson, 1971; Swanson, 1971; Tiryakian 1971; Walton, 1971; Wax, 1971; Rhoads, 1972; Urry 1972; Zeitlin and Touraine, 1972.

[4] Burawoy, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c and Burawoy et al, 2005 promote the role of public sociology in the US context and delineate the interrelationships of what are identified as the four key emphases or trajectories of sociology - professional sociology, critical sociology, policy sociology, public sociology.

[5] For responses, see Acker, 2005; Aronowitz, 2005; Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2005; Urry, 2005a.

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