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Movements making knowledge: a new wave of inspiration for sociology?

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Abstract

Sociology's marginality to public discussion of the crisis stems partly from naïveté about the sociology of its own knowledge, in particular about its interlocutors' interests. Historically, sociology has repeatedly re-established its intellectual relevance through its dialogue with movements for social change; this article argues that another such dialogue is overdue.

Starting from existing discussions of social movements and their knowledge production, the article focuses on the organisational dimension of such knowledge and explores how this is elaborated in the current movement wave. Looking at movement spaces of theoretical analysis, new popular education processes and movements' knowledge creation institutions, the article highlights potential contributions to renewing sociological processes of theorising, teaching and engaged research respectively, paying particular attention to movement practices of 'talking between worlds'. It concludes with a call for a dialogue of critical solidarity between public sociology and new forms of social knowledge production.

Keywords

engaged research, learning and knowledge production, popular education, public sociology, social movements, sociology of knowledge

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Introduction: why does sociology have so little purchase?

The current crisis touches many aspects of society. *International relations*: US hegemony over two historically central areas, Latin America and the Middle East, has been shaken by the 'pink tide' and the 'Arab Spring'. Its planned sequence of wars against 'rogue states' quickly ran into the sands, with haemorrhaging support among Middle Eastern and European allies and among US elites. *Economics*: early indications of a neo-Keynesian shift around 2008 found little purchase with global decision-makers, relying on a finger-crossing insistence that neo-liberal orthodoxy will turn up trumps. *Politics*: the anti-capitalist 'movement of movements' in the global North and Latin America morphed into the world's largest protest ever in 2003; the post-9/11 dismantling of that alliance in the US was remade by 'Occupy', while in Europe anti-austerity protest has encountered multiple *de facto* suspensions of democracy in the name of fiscal legitimacy. *Environment*: the failure of the Copenhagen summit and the subsequent 'dash for gas', with fracking and tar sand exploitation, co-exist with an increasing ecological crisis threatening large-scale disaster (Chase-Dunn, 2013).

Sociology, perhaps, could be a central voice in understanding the *interrelationships* between these different fields and analysing how social crises develop and their possible outcomes. Yet the public intellectuals whose voice is heard are rarely sociologists. Geographers, philosophers, anthropologists, biologists, economists, literary figures, historians are all well-represented in Northern public arenas. Sociology – with very few exceptions – is not; if anything, sociologists are still struggling to come to terms with Burawoy's (2005) call for public sociology. How can we understand this new crisis of western sociology?

Career, funding and publication mechanisms offer one explanation; we are rewarded for engaging with the discipline, its key texts and current fashions; for writing in high-status journals and displaying our sophistication in its existing forms. Yet other disciplines are hardly immune from these pressures; our own disciplinary culture must form part of the explanation.

One important aspect of this culture is a constituent naïveté about the sociology of knowledge. We act as if we believe that if we carefully research and publish something important, people will read it – despite knowing that our journals lie behind paywalls and linguistic barriers. Even more importantly, we believe that knowledge *must* have an effect, like *ancien régime* peasants who believed that if the king only knew about their sufferings he would act. Open reflection on who we are writing for, what their interests and needs are, and what we hope to achieve is rare; serious reflections on the relationship between knowledge and agency are unusual in first-year courses, PhD training or the mentoring of young academics. In practice, all too often, the dull compulsion of economic necessity – competition for "consumers", meeting funders' requirements, media-friendly work, "policy relevance" – answers these questions for us. We can hardly blame others for our marginalisation if we continue to take our lead from institutions in crisis.

There is also the question of *what* we research. For some decades, the cliché has been that sociologists should research power-holders rather than the powerless. This is rarely linked to reflection on we might *do* with our findings, who our audience might be and action we expect of them. In a cynical age, the proposition that such work might provoke a legitimacy crisis seems highly optimistic. Similarly, the assumption that the sociology of outrage might have a major public impact is rarely thought through. To highlight the appalling conditions of many people's lives does not lead to real social change of itself – *unless* there is a significant social movement which can use the

research. Nor is 'critical' analysis of structures and institutions effective in isolation, without practical dialogue with social agents committed to their transformation.

If we want our work to be genuinely relevant, in other words, this implies engaging with people whose interests and ideology are not tied to the status quo; more precisely, a dialogue of critical solidarity with social movements for social change, and engaged research which speak to the questions asked by such movements rather than using them to explore our own disciplinary interests. Yet the history of sociology suggests that the boot is on the other foot: transformations in sociology come from social movements, not the reverse.

In the period often taught as foundational, it was not only Marx and Engels whose thought was shaped by the movements that shaped their world. Weber, the conservative opponent of socialism, and Durkheim, the republican 'secular pope', both formed their thought in dialogue with movements. The same is true for the revitalisation of sociology from the 1960s: the arrival of feminism and Marxism within the academy, the growth of postcolonial and Foucauldian approaches, the struggles of scholars identifying as gay or lesbian, migrant or minority, and the methodological challenges represented by participatory, feminist and other approaches were all shaped by social movements.

The effective performance of public sociology requires a critical engagement which does not assume the goodwill of gatekeepers; a sense of agency, in particular a reflection on social movements; and a degree of humility, acknowledging that sociology's most publicly significant periods have been shaped by movements rather than the reverse. We need to take the sociology of our own knowledge seriously, and ask under what conditions our work can engage with the largest questions in society and be recognised as having general relevance.

Social movements as knowledge producers

If the above is written polemically, the remainder is presented more conventionally. In this section I discuss the theoretical basis for seeing social movements as significant knowledge producers and sources of epistemological innovation. There is by now an extensive literature on social movements and knowledge, and a fruitful overlap with work in adult / popular education (Hall et al., 2009; Choudry, 2009; Cox and Flesher Fominaya, 2009; Choudry and Kapoor, 2010; Hall et al., 2012). It can be reasonably said that the question is not *whether* learning and knowledge production is a significant part of social movements but rather how to interpret this – and the implications for sociology's disciplinary knowledge.

One starting point is Gramsci's (1991) distinction between two modes of knowledge: a 'common sense' derived from hegemonic social relationships and a 'good sense' derived from popular practice¹. The two regularly find themselves in conflict when people are exploited, oppressed or culturally stigmatised; this tension is a fundamental source of social movements (Nilsen, 2009).

Wainwright (1994) extends this insight into a broader account of postwar social movements, in which their activity (paradigmatically, feminist consciousness-raising) articulates situated and hitherto-tacit knowledge into more elaborated forms. Such knowledge, consisting both of practice

and previously-unacknowledged forms of suffering, cannot be identified from within disciplinary circuits. Furthermore, conventional research, in which researchers external to the group's experiences pursue disciplinary agendas, is limited in its ability to articulate knowledge which participants are struggling to admit to themselves.

Freire (1996) developed a similar understanding into a methodology for popular education, where learners are subjects rather than objects, a critical perspective is taken on common sense, and participants draw on their own knowledge, articulated dialogically, to change unjust social conditions: education as social movement. This overlaps with the social-psychological approach found in Vološinov and cultural-historical activity theory (Collins, 2013), which stresses struggle and dialogue in the process of movement learning (de Smet, 2012).

These and related approaches (Cox and Flesher Fominaya, 2009) present movements as knowledge producers because there are fundamental, structurally-shaped features of most people's experience in an unequal society which are not adequately addressed by hegemonic 'common sense' and which can be most effectively explored in struggles for transformation. Social movements and popular education thus constitute processes through which people identify such features of injustice, oppression or stigma collectively and articulate alternative understandings to change social relations.

Historically, this perspective can be applied to various experiences. Thompson famously argued that the English working class 'was present at its own making', in developing class-consciousness, moving from radical-liberal politics to struggles for social equality, and constructing its own organisations (Cox, 2013a). This continued into the later 19th century with the 'Workers' University' of self-organised debate and discussion (Flett, 2006) and the early 20th century with the working-class appropriations of Marxism that preceded the imposition of Stalinist orthodoxies, often by university-educated intellectuals (Macintyre, 1980).

It can also be argued (Barker et al., 2013) that Marxism itself is best understood as articulating the learning of the workers' movement. Similar cases can be made for feminism (Eschle et al., 2011), for environmentalism (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991) and indeed for European social theory more broadly (Cox and Flesher Fominaya, 2013). Much of the knowledge now treated as unproblematically academic, including some of its highest-status products, has roots in the efforts of popular movements to contest the status quo (Hall, 2009)ⁱⁱ.

Three aspects of movement knowledge

But what is this knowledge? Eyerman and Jamison's reading of social movements sees them as consisting fundamentally of cognitive praxis. In their approach, developed around 1980s environmentalism, this has three dimensions (1991: 66-67). One is cosmological (how the world works); one is organisational (how to 'do' movements); one, finally, is technological.ⁱⁱⁱ The three dimensions overlap with O'Sullivan's (1999) three educational moments of critique, resistance and creation. Combining both approaches suggests important ways in which movements can contribute to a renewed sociology.

Critique of existing social structures (cosmology) is clearly fundamental to sociology. It has given us Marxism and class analysis, feminism and gender analysis, critiques of a racialised social order and essentialised nationhood, disability studies, queer theory, analyses of the world-system and postcolonialism, and so on. This is a centrally creative aspect of sociology, whose timespan in stimulating research is far longer than most academically-generated theories. Without the critical / cosmological moment of movement knowledge, sociology would be poor indeed.

The moment of *resistance* – the organisational dimension – is fundamental to researching social movements. It is also important for areas such as the exploration of participatory democracy (della Porta, 2013); subaltern forms of popular culture (Hall and Jefferson, 1993); or popular education processes (Kane, 2001). Movement organising techniques also generate new forms of research methodology (Fuster Morell, 2009), as well as informing many critiques of poor methodologies.

All too often (critical) analysis highlights how unlikely the wealthy and powerful are to transform inequality, while sociological methods often position the poor and powerless as agents of understanding. Often, however, sociological work then short-circuits the question of *political* agency with (supposedly ‘realistic’) political prescriptions which amount to an *a priori* commitment to the policy process or institutionalisation. We could, perhaps, learn something from listening to what movements (and social movement studies) have learned about the actual complexities of effective action for change.

Lastly, I want to suggest that O’Sullivan’s moment of *creation* can encompass Eyerman and Jamison’s technological dimension. Movements create new institutions to foreshadow the societies they envision, whether they imagine these as ‘building the new society in the shell of the old’, as a transformation driven by alternative technology, or simply as popular institutions. Colin Ward’s work on apparent trivia such as allotments (Crouch and Ward, 1997) has shown how much of social life consists of bottom-up self-organisation, at odds to various degrees (as e.g. with squatting: Owens et al., 2013) with the logics of state and capital (Habermas, 1981).

Paying attention to this creative dimension enables us not only to observe the existing tensions within any social order and how at a micro-scale particular social relations are extended or pushed back (as with workplace power), but also to consider how social orders change. What, for example, is the role of the institutions created by second-wave feminism (Taylor and Whittier, 1995) in remaking Northern women’s everyday lives? More recently, how does the ‘emotional praxis’ of home birth activists contribute to restructuring women’s self-understanding as mothers (Maguire, 2002)? Similar questions could be raised about ‘everyday environmentalism’ around organic food or environmental justice, for example (Tovey, 1999; Scandrett, 2012). The broad question of how social movements remake *everyday* life, whether in the post-60s context or with the newest range of movements, calls for a new kind of historical sociology.

While all three dimensions are intertwined in movement processes, the creative / technological / ‘alternative’ dimension varies hugely between movements, while sociology is already thoroughly infused with the critical / cosmological / structural analysis aspect. My focus here is therefore the moment of resistance / organisation – the form of knowledge best researched in studies of social movements and where movements have most commonalities. The central section of this paper, therefore, emphasises modes of popular learning-in-struggle around techniques and strategies of organising. Put another way, it stresses what for many thoughtful people today, the potential

audience for a relevant public sociology, is the most urgent question: ‘yes, but what should we *do* about the crisis?’

From practice to theory: creating knowledge in the crisis

If movements go from practice to theory (Gordon, 2007) in generating knowledge, for presentation purposes I reverse this and start with contexts where movements articulate and assert the validity of their knowledge externally, before proceeding to discuss contexts where movement knowledge is formalised and disseminated internally, and finally contexts where movements directly create knowledge through practice, in each case emphasising content around organisation / resistance. The separation is artificial - knowledge creation, articulation, learning and dialogue are not separate processes – but these different settings vary in the degree of attention placed on one or another aspect. In particular, this article asks what inspiration they can offer for new modes of sociological theorising, teaching and research respectively. Hence I focus particularly on explicitly knowledge-oriented activities, rather than e.g. learning within movement media (Meek, 2011), worker-run enterprises (Larrabure et al., 2011), or radical art (Clover, 2012).

This article pays particular attention to the flourishing of such activities in the context of the long wave of movements against neoliberalism, originating in the ‘movement of movements’ from the later 1990s, shaped by a dialogue between European and Latin American movement learning processes which expanded to include North American, South Asian and South African struggles in particular. In Latin America, these processes have continued through the ‘pink tide’, while the anti-war movement brought a new engagement with movements in the Arab world, preceding the events of 2011; while in Europe the last few years have seen indignados, Occupy and other anti-austerity movements in a continuing ferment.

This wave has involved a particular attention to learning and knowledge, drawing on the earlier movement experiences mentioned above but also responding to its own internal diversity and the resultant need for reflection. As Conway (2006) notes, coalitions and networks are particularly important in movement learning processes (see also Daro, 2009 on learning and difference in the global justice movement). Since each constituent movement, as we have seen, can be understood as a knowledge producer or as consisting of cognitive praxis, the encounter *between* movements forces a particularly conscious ‘talking between worlds’, and a fruitful exploration of different kinds of learning activities to enable this. Sociology, I will argue, stands to learn considerably from this.

The current movement wave is still young, its forms very much a matter of internal and external contestation, and only some of the literature now being generated is helpful to the questions pursued here. Thus for each of the three aspects of movement knowledge discussed below, I combine discussion of a relatively well-researched and –published (global or US) project, alongside discussion of an aspect of the current wave of Irish movements in which I have participated and carried out research, and indications of the wider spectrum of developing projects in Britain and the US, in order to identify some possible inspirations for new approaches to sociological practices of theorising, teaching and researching respectively^{iv}. I conclude with a call for a dialogue of critical solidarity between sociology and these new forms of social knowledge production.

Movement-linked spaces of theoretical analysis

Contexts where movement participants publicly articulate overarching, relatively ‘disembedded’ knowledge are the most easily comparable with currently-dominant forms of sociological theorising. Their strength is in speaking across wide social gulfs – between different movements, political traditions, places and social experiences but also between movement participants and others. This is particularly characteristic of the current movement wave:

‘it is hardly a historical accident that activists chose at this moment to work within broad progressive networks using participatory forms of democracy in which a plurality of opinions and strategies were encouraged. In this sense the shape and organisation of the global justice movement can be understood as a conscious attempt to reevaluate the complex legacy of a century of radical thought and experience’ (Finnegan, 2009: 216)

Similarly, Hall (2012: 127) writes that Occupy ‘has drawn more attention to the processes of learning, to collective thinking, to active listening ... than movements that have preceded it’. A paradigmatic example is the World Social Forum (WSF), characterised by De Sousa Santos (2006) as an ‘ecology of knowledges’. First held in 2001 as a counter to the then-hegemonic neoliberal discourses of the World Economic Forum, it has become a key institution for connecting global struggles.

The WSF is arguably a democratic think-in, constituted by the difficult dialogue between activists from many different countries, slowly developing common conversations: if ‘neoliberalism’ has now become a dirty word internationally, this is in large part due to the practical discovery that Andean indigenous groups and European trade unionists, Indian peasant farmers and North American ecologists can all name the structures they are battling in these terms. The WSF’s self-imposed refusal of joint political action enables it to act as a space for reflection and dialogue; given this and the high costs involved in an annual international gathering, it is no surprise that many participants are professional intellectuals: after students (36.9%) the next largest occupational categories are academics (11.9%), media (5.2%) and other educators (4.5%) (Chase-Dunn et al., 2007).^v

The WSF is both a consciously-created movement space for discussion and also supports a well-developed network of meta-reflection on its own process,^{vi} including the OpenSpace forum, the OpenWSF platform, the WSF-discuss list and an extensive series of publications from the Indian CACIM centre^{vii}. Consistent with ‘an ecology of knowledges’, most of this reflection seeks not so much to define a single theoretical language to encompass all the movements involved but rather to develop ways of communicating across this diversity of popular agency.

The WSF is not unique in such practices among the processes of the current movement wave. Similar reflections were articulated poetically by the Zapatistas since 1994 (arguably the 1995 and 1996 Zapatista *Encuentros* were seminal for the wave) and by other groups since. In the wake of Anglo-American ‘identity politics’ and largely failed attempts to ally multiple movements around continental green parties in the 1980s and 1990s, it could be argued that it is the radical rootedness of recent indigenous mobilisations that underpins this theoretical biodiversity. Almost by definition, to exist as collective subjects, indigenous communities consist of a specific way of living together, so that their cultural autonomy is non-negotiable in a different way to Northern groups who can hope

to 'mainstream' their identities in the post-1960s period of cultural diversification and niche markets. The symbolic and practical impact of the Zapatistas and their refusal of a single language made necessary new forms of intellectual dialogue between groups which might otherwise have been forced either to compete or to seek a single common language.

The social movements journal *Interface* is a second example of this non-hierarchical conversation. Founded as a space for dialogue between academic researchers and movement thinkers (with articles refereed by both) and edited regionally autonomous groups, its eleven issues to date have been open-access (not restricted to universities) and geared to conversations across the languages of different movements, disciplines, political traditions, national cultures and so on^{viii}. As with the CACIM publications, it is not light reading: a typical issue is nearly 500 pages long, and some aspirations are more easily met than others (multi-lingual publishing, for example). Nonetheless it has had 25,000 readers in the past year (Cristina Flesher Fominaya, 2013, personal communication), far more than any purely academic journal of social movement studies, and much more widely distributed geographically.

At its 2009 founding *Interface* was a direct contrast to the highest-ranked journal in the field, *Mobilization*, which was (and is) commercially produced (behind a paywall), dedicated to academic-only peer review, and resistant to approaches outside the orthodoxies of US 'social movement studies'. In 2011, however, *Mobilization* generated an open-access blog, *Mobilizing Ideas*, geared towards 'dialogue between scholars and activists' – albeit still edited entirely by academics^{ix}, dominated by US voices and in practice operating more to valorise the cultural capital of its parent journal's theoretical approach than to articulate social movement knowledge. Unlike the democratic orientations of the 'movement of movements', 'contributions to *Mobilizing Ideas* are typically by invitation'^x.

Closer to movement approaches is the online magazine *Reflections on a revolution (ROAR)*^{xi}, founded in 2010 by a group including postgraduates from the European University Institute's centre for social movement studies. The differences to *Mobilizing Ideas* are marked: a fundamental internationalism, engaged researchers rather than a programmatic separation between scholars and activists, openness to contributions, independent initiative rather than institutional sponsorship, the use of Creative Commons, and most substantively the absence of any sense that academic knowledge is the only valid source of understanding. Like much of the current movement wave, ROAR is theoretical and dialogical without intellectual closure: Zibechi, Agamben, Holloway, Michael Albert, Chomsky and Marcos all appear in a project which is closer to the spirit of a Zapatista *encuentro* or a World Social Forum than a seminar at Notre Dame.

These examples highlight contrasting concepts of theoretical knowledge production. In one, knowledge is the property of the university, more specifically a single, hierarchically-constituted and intellectually discrete subdiscipline. Beyond carefully-managed dissemination and discussion with invited participants, its audience inhabits a paywall bubble – in other words consists of a relatively small group of academics, primarily in the First World and in research-oriented universities.

In the other, knowledge is understood not only to arise democratically but to some extent to *consist in* the interaction between differently-situated, experientially-grounded and practice-oriented modes of knowing. It is arrived at not from a closed space or from participation in an invited space

but rather through claimed or created spaces intended to enable discussion *between* different modes of knowing.

There are, of course, dangers in such approaches, and not everything said in movement contexts is equally true, helpful or insightful. Of course the same is true of academia, as the recent case of David Held and Anthony Giddens in relation to Saif Gaddafi and the Libyan regime has highlighted. Senior positions, long publication records and major research grants are no guarantee against getting it spectacularly wrong - intellectually, politically and morally.

Current movement practice, then, is at odds with the dominant approach to sociological theory. Contemporary movement theorising is more collective, democratic and practice-based; it seeks above all a mode of conversation *between* different intellectual languages rather than seeking to boost the cultural capital involved in acquiring and developing a single approach. If sociological theory is to regain greater public relevance in the context of the current wave of movements, this ability to talk between worlds is one of its most urgent needs.

Movement spaces of self-education and formalising knowledge

A classic division of social movements' intellectual labour distinguishes between agitation, education and organisation. *Agitation* is saying something simple to large numbers of people to convince them that something is unjust. *Organisation* is the business of directly working to construct social movements. *Education* is the process whereby movement participants come to understand the deeper forces underlying the issues they are campaigning on, the nature of the opposition they face, the history of movement struggles, and so on. Unlike most sociology teaching, movement education in this sense works with people who have already become consciously active subjects. It is thus also distinct from the kind of radical education which seeks to bring people from discontent to analysis or from analysis to action. This section explores *movement* spaces of self-education and the formalisation of existing knowledge, where participants are already movement activists.

Paradoxically, this is the area where the university model has had most impact. If in the 1890s there were two dozen independent public talks on atheism *alone* every Sunday in London (and comparable figures for other movements: Cox, 2013b), today such events have declined dramatically. The reasons for this are complex: while some have retreated from the public sphere into consumerism, others find that expanded education, libraries and media access enable alternative routes to intellectual activity (Rose, 2001). Simultaneously, in the global North, movements' level of organisational intensity has declined dramatically, far fewer organisations can sustain their own learning spaces and what remains is often drastically depoliticised (Grayson, 2011).

The post-1960s entry of Marxism, feminism, race and ethnic studies, queer studies and so on plays a role here. If as late as the 1920s a good self-education could fit someone for an active life as a movement organiser, by the 1970s the organisations implied by such a career were ceasing to exist. Nonetheless, the activist skills of being able to speak on anything, to write at the drop of a hat, to master a complex body of literature, to hold an audience and to organise one's own time were good preparations for academic careers. For a long time, too, boundaries could be blurred and it was possible to convince oneself that teaching radical theory was *per se* radical.

The conditions of plausibility of this analysis have long been declining, but university (especially postgraduate) contexts still see significant numbers of intelligent and self-motivated people, who take ideas seriously as having real-world implications, read extensively, debate with each other and often formulate practical projects reaching outside the classroom. Unsurprisingly, both 'official' postgraduate courses and 'unofficial' counter-universities have flourished in recent years as education costs soar and movements critique official knowledge.

One well-developed example is Antioch's MS in Environmental Studies with a focus on Advocacy for Social Justice and Sustainability, now over a decade old. Developed out of critical pedagogy and an analysis of 'movement halfway houses', it offers an explicitly activist training programme geared both to the needs of environmental organising and those of university accreditation. Its five key areas are ecological literacy; political analysis; organising skills; nonprofit management; and personal transformation. The course is very conscious of historical context^{xii} and draws on a PhD-level analysis of the skills required for movement organising (Chase, 2006).

By contrast, the more recent MA in Community Education, Equality and Social Activism at the National University of Ireland Maynooth^{xiii} is designed for participants who are already skilled and active in a wide range of communities, movements and organising styles. As in movement-linked spaces of theoretical debate, the assumption is that the encounter between the different worlds represented by participants will both enable an articulation of existing, tacit knowledge and develop a wider dialogue around strategies for social change and a deeper understanding of the perspectives and concerns of other movements and communities. The course is closely linked to on-the-ground struggles and student dissertations are focussed on developing movement practice^{xiv}.

Now entering its fifth year, staff have initiated participatory action research on the course (Finnegan et al., 2013). Initial results indicate that participants strongly value the experience of democratic, dialogical learning processes and the widening of their political perspectives, which provokes reflection on their own practice. At the same time, the open encounter between different worlds is very demanding and collective work has its own difficulties in a society where it is rare.

More widely, the recent crisis has seen a flourishing of alternatives to the conventional university model, often originating from critical postgraduates and precarious researchers. The current movement wave is particularly marked by organising strategies based around what Langdon (2009: 81) calls a dialogue-based process of mutual learning rather than the didactic process of instruction more characteristic of earlier state-centric movements, and this is reflected in the kinds of educational strategies represented in the UK's 'Sustaining Alternative Universities' conference and the Free Universities Network^{xv}. Alternative education projects are notoriously fragile (Avrich, 2005): they face all the complexities of any new educational initiative, without the institutional and funding base of conventional initiatives, while setting the bar much higher around access, content and pedagogy.

The energy going into such high-risk projects does not merely reflect the prestige of the university model; it expresses the intellectual levels at which many social movements operate, the rewards of being part of a committed group of collective, democratic learners, and the political productivity of such projects. If few such projects survive (Lincoln's Social Science Centre, founded in 2010, is a relative veteran), many serve as 'movement halfway houses' in a different sense – spaces where activists learn to work together and articulate shared perspectives. It is likely that (as with earlier

popular education processes), such initiatives will create greater space for less adventurous initiatives within the system.

More broadly, sociological teaching stands to learn from these initiatives, not least in terms of their positioning of participants as active social agents rather than passive consumers (even, as in some 'critical' approaches, passive consumers whom the lecturer can transform), in their linking of education and social practice and in their exploration of collective and democratic methodologies which turn diversity of experience and knowledge into a fruitful source of understanding which can encompass these 'many worlds'.

Movements creating knowledge through practice

Thirdly, we can discuss spaces where movements *create* new knowledge directly. Typically, these follow the modes identified in the Gramsci-Wainwright-Freire analysis of the articulation of practice-based and situated 'good sense' against ideological and hegemonic 'common sense', or of the articulation of previously tacit knowledge in struggle. In important ways these can be understood as research processes, albeit closer to (say) participatory action research than the models more commonly taught in undergraduate sociology.

The Irish Grassroots Gatherings process (McCarthy, 2005; Cox, 2007) are a good example of what this can mean in practice. A central element of the Irish movement of movements (Cox, 2006), 13 gatherings have been held between 2001 and the present, bringing together anarchists, feminists, libertarian socialists, radical democrats and activists in anti-austerity, ecological, community, women's, anti-war, trade union and other movements.

The Gatherings are organised around a very conscious bottom-up model without a controlling centre; different regionally-based groups organise Gatherings according to the themes and orientations that matter for movements in their area. Unlike 'recruiting event' models, they are not centred on high-profile speakers and attempts to mobilise people for pre-planned activities; typically two-thirds to three-quarters of participants are already activists and the point is to 'learn from each other's struggles' rather than treat each other as 'punters'.

A typical workshop might have two or three presenters from different movements giving short introductions on a shared topic; the assumption is that most other participants also have some experience and insights, and the goal is to learn from the exchange. Facilitators are expressly primed to encourage an equal discussion, using various tools from grassroots movement contexts^{xvi}.

More formally, the pedagogical strategy moves towards the articulation of a less situationally-specific understanding but still developed out of activist praxis, by confronting several related-but-distinct experiences and practices with one another. As workshops are typically not oriented towards taking an immediate decision or organising an action, a learning space is created, which is not a Habermasian 'ideal speech situation' but is nevertheless a meeting between relative peers, free from immediate practical pressures and without giving too much prestige to any one individual.

The Grassroots Gatherings enabled the formation of a range of alliances around particular projects (anti-war activism, summit protests, local organising) and the broadening of various movement

identities. The process was not always linear, however; their single most transformative moment was an internal feminist uprising which had long-term effects for a new generation of direct-action feminism and developments such as safe-space policies. Talking between worlds is not always a polite process.

At a subtler level, the Gatherings enabled the articulation, sharing and formalisation of a wide range of forms of activist knowledge, from direct action techniques to gender relations within movements and from structural analysis to activist sustainability. In the process, they also enabled a move away from the crudely pragmatic emphasis on 'doing what we do' which easily gains the ideological high ground within more enclosed movements and organisations – and lends itself to cooptation within an otherwise unchanged social structure. The systematic generation of counter-knowledge is part and parcel of the process of social change.

More broadly, a range of authors (Gordon, 2007; Maeckelbergh, 2009; Szolucha, 2013) have argued that the global justice movement and more recently the indignados, Occupy and other anti-authoritarian movements have represented a process of developing new knowledge around direct democratic processes. Modes of consensus decision-making with long historical roots in anarchist, Quaker and cooperative organisation were extended in various anti-authoritarian social movements from the 1960s through to the 1990s, most obviously feminism (Levine and Freeman, 1984), radical ecology (Coover et al., 1985), non-violent direct action (Starhawk, 1982) and some working-class community organising (Cox and Mullan, 2001).

In the 'movement of movements' inputs were drawn from all these and the rather different consensus-oriented approaches of majority-world indigenous and peasant movements. Gordon (2007) argues that the 'movement of movements' systematised tools for consensus in larger groups which were not pre-constituted; Maeckelbergh (2012) and Szolucha (2013) show how anti-austerity movements saw the further extension of these processes from the early 2000s summit protests to dramatic occupations of public space in the 2010s.

In both Grassroots Gatherings and the new democratic practices, we see forms of movement-generated knowledge becoming more articulated and less situation-bound, developing an alternative 'local rationality' (Nilsen, 2009) from its immediate context towards a more generalisable form of movement knowledge which constitutes an alternative way of operating not only to hegemonic 'common sense' but also to the expert-led knowledge which e.g. Giddens (1991) tells us modernity inevitably entails. *Contra* Giddens, expert-led knowledge may be inevitable in technocratic and authoritarian social orders; but it is not the only way in which human beings can organise themselves, even in complex situations. Indeed both Hayek's critique of centralised planning and Wainwright's (1994) democratic critique of Hayek take their point of departure in the *inability* of expert knowledge to adequately assess the social realm. The articulation of new forms of practice, 'tacit knowledge' and 'good sense' is in practice a form of collective research geared to uncovering what has *not* previously been known (and in this is sharply different from the predictability rewarded by most research funding processes).

These movement analogies of primary research take their starting-points from movement needs and practice (not institutional logics); embody strongly collective and dialogical power relations; and show a capacity for self-transcendence, moving beyond their intellectual starting-points and creating new kinds of knowledge: all things which 'actually-existing' sociological research could stand to learn

from. Underpinning this is the direct, first-person encounter between the different 'worlds' of different local rationalities and forms of movement knowledge, which turns both aspects of their situatedness (their roots in specific contexts and their partial character) into strengths as broader forms of knowledge are articulated.

Finally, we might note the development of movement re-analysis processes. A series of 'popular political economy' projects in the UK and Ireland^{xvii} have aimed to reclaim the once-radical knowledge encoded in Marxist and other forms of socialist political economy from the academy which is now their primary purveyor. Using radical and popular education tools, young activists trained in the academy are working to teach political economy for local purposes and needs to a range of movement and community groups. The outcomes are as yet very preliminary, but suggest *both* a steep learning curve on the part of conventionally-trained activists to reshape their academic knowledge in a form suitable to popular needs *and* a great thirst for this knowledge and ability to see its potentially emancipatory impact. This is, perhaps, a salutary reminder that often the result of a previous process of movement co-optation (here, academic Marxism) can nonetheless leave *content* (if not forms) which can be recuperated by subsequent movement waves. If some kinds of sociology are perhaps overdue for archiving, others may perhaps be ready to be reused, repaired and recycled.

Conclusion

What does all this mean for how sociology can remain relevant and engage with new forms of social knowledge production? Perhaps the most important point is the proposition that there *are* such forms. Sociology is *a* mode in which societies generate knowledge; to claim that it has particular value need not mean to exclude other modes. Indeed, as this article has suggested, a greater ability to engage with other discourses would itself go a long way towards re-establishing its relevance. Fundamental to the current movement wave has been the practice of 'talking between worlds', of communicating between different, partial, situated articulations of popular experiences and cognitive praxis and making this encounter a source of intellectual riches as well as political strength.

The introduction argued that sociology's most creative moments have been those in which it engaged strongly with the knowledge produced by social movements: in the later 19th and early 20th centuries and again in the later 1960s and the 1970s. I have suggested that another such wave is developing, centred on the 'movement of movements' and anti-austerity movements. These movements are remarkable generators of knowledge and pedagogies, and indeed many of their participants are postgraduates or precarious researchers in the social sciences: the dialogue is already happening and elements of movement theorising, educational and research processes are affecting sociology; some of the implications suggested above are starting to be explored.

As in previous generations, this raises tensions between processes of commodification or co-option of movement knowledge and those of dialogue and solidarity; the difference is defined, in essence, by their intended or implied interlocutors. Sociology is not doing as well here as disciplines such as anthropology, geography or political science, where much of the most interesting work on contemporary movements is being done. For various reasons, power relations within sociology tend

more towards disciplinary closure; put another way, they disadvantage attempts at dialogue with new forms of social knowledge *more* than is usual for any academic discipline.

There are obvious instrumental reasons why engagement with new forms of knowledge is a better long-term strategy for sociology. Perceived public relevance, student numbers, 'impact' and 'dissemination' all now encourage *some* degree of dialogue. I want, however, to conclude with a more substantial argument. The appearance of a new dimension to the sociology of knowledge is usually an indicator of a worthwhile dialogue between sociology and society; it shows academic theory and research being forced to engage with other social forms of knowledge generation, representing under-represented experiences of the social world. When, as with social movements, this knowledge has a critical edge – critique of underlying structure, articulating counter-knowledge, or developing alternative modes of theory, education and research, this is a particularly valuable learning goad, forcing reflection on what, of sociology's 'heritage', remains valuable and what can be packed away.

A fundamental question is who we are writing for. Recent decades have seen sociology downplay a genuinely historical sense of social change for often poorly-informed discussions of modernity, a sign of the relatively stable bubble which Northern sociology has had the privilege to inhabit. Popular collective agency has been increasingly written off, with sociologies reflecting business as usual and a consumerist sense of agency divorced from wider contexts. This is shaped by a progressive withdrawal from dialogue with movements – and an increasing dialogue with state and private funders, commercial publishers, and students conceived of as consumers. Worldly wisdom writ as high theory has been taken to mean, if not the end of history, certainly that there was something embarrassingly naïve to the belief that capitalism, patriarchy or a racialised global order might be not only historical products but also vulnerable to popular pressure and liable to change. As our daily realities became defined by competition for funding and publications on increasingly artificial terms, we perhaps projected our own resignation onto others.

I remember my own initial fascination on discovering that it was possible to study society, to understand it and to change it. This is the core justification that we as sociologists can offer others for their continued support – if we speak to readers, students and research participants as fellow humans interested in critical understanding, social change and equality rather than in terms of our contribution to their careers, EU governance or gross domestic product. Our continued engagement with popular sources of counter-knowledge about society is a means of remaining true to that vision. It does not entail an uncritical approach or unconditional support; but it is fundamentally different from attempts to dismiss or co-opt the knowledge being produced by the new wave of social movements.

I close with an image many of us have seen far too often: a conventional textbook on globalisation, social change or modernity with a dramatic cover photo of protesters - and a complete absence of social movements *within* those same covers. This is an image of bad faith: an acknowledgement that the wider world, even our own students, is more interested in the movements we use to sell conventional sociology than that sociology itself. It is time to take that interest seriously, and to try to write books which are *more* relevant than their covers.

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ⁱ Gramsci does not distinguish sharply between practice derived from relations with the material world and those with other people.

ⁱⁱ It has also been widely observed (e.g. Rodriguez, 2010; Choudry, 2012; Cresswell and Spandler, 2013) that current processes of academic and NGO knowledge production displace and submerge much movement-generated knowledge.

ⁱⁱⁱ This third dimension – important in early alternative technology – has since ebbed within environmentalism, albeit remaining important in organic farming (Etmanski, 2012).

^{iv} No doubt readers will have examples of their own, as these approaches are being explored in many different contexts.

^v The next largest categories were activist / organisers, consultant / analysts, 'services' and researchers.

^{vi} It was not unique in this; the European Social Forum, like other social forum processes, did the same.

^{vii} Respectively <http://www.openspaceforum.net/twiki/tiki-index.php>, <http://openfsm.net/>, http://www.openspaceforum.net/mailman/listinfo/worldsocialforum-discuss_openspaceforum.net and for the CACIM books (<http://www.openword.in/books> and <http://www.cacim.net/twiki/tiki-index.php?page=Publications>).

^{viii} <http://www.interfacejournal.net/submissions/guidelines-for-contributors/>

^{ix} Another, telling, formulation talks about 'exchanges between leading scholars from the social sciences and humanities and the activists they study' (<http://mobilizingideas.wordpress.com/about/>).

^x <http://mobilizingideas.wordpress.com/about/>.

^{xi} <http://ROARmag.org>

^{xii} <http://www.antiochne.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/inspirations.pdf>

^{xiii} <http://ceesa-ma.blogspot.com>

^{xiv} Malone (2012) is one example of research from the course.

^{xv} <http://sustainingalternatives.wordpress.com/>

^{xvi} See Ziadah and Hanieh (2010) for parallel experiences in Palestinian solidarity organising.

^{xvii} <http://www.ppeuk.org/PPE%20Report%202013.pdf>; <http://dublinopinion.com/2013/02/18/economics-as-if-people-really-mattered-galway-learning-circle-19-feb-10-april-introduction/> etc.