Article

European Journal of Social Theory
14(4) 537–556
© The Author(s) 2011
Reprints and permission:
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1368431011417937
est.sagepub.com

Sociology after Fordism: Prospects and problems

John Holmwood
University of Nottingham, UK

Abstract
A number of commentators have suggested that the shift from a Fordist to a post-Fordist regime of political economy has had positive consequences for sociology, including the reinforcement of critical sociologies (Burawoy, 2005; Steinmetz, 2005). This article argues that, although disciplinary hierarchies have been destabilized, what is emerging is a new form of instrumental knowledge, that of applied interdisciplinary social studies. This development has had a particular impact upon sociology. Savage and Burrows (2007), for example, argue that sociological knowledge no longer has a privileged claim to authority and is increasingly in competition with social knowledge produced by the private sector and agencies of the public sector. The response of many sociologists to such claims has been to reassert the importance of the discipline as the purveyor of critically relevant knowledge about society. The article traces how the idea of internal critique within sociology has developed to embrace 'knowing capitalism' (Thrift, 2005), at the same time as declaring the impossibility of sociological knowledge. The critique of sociology also becomes the critique of critique and what remains is the instrumentalization of knowledge. Where many sociologists continue to claim a special interest in critical knowledge, the article suggests that, in contrast, we potentially confront the problem that such knowledge may itself be facing a crisis of reproduction.

Keywords
crisis, critical sociology, Fordism, interdisciplinarity, post-Fordism

This article addresses issues in the sociology of sociological knowledge and their implications for the practice of sociological theory. In particular, it addresses a potential crisis in sociology which I argue is associated with the rise of interdisciplinary applied social

Corresponding author:
John Holmwood, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK
Email: john.holmwood@nottingham.ac.uk

studies occasioned by a changed environment of higher education. My concern is with changes that have taken place over the past decades, broadly since the 1950s to the present. One common representation of these changes is that of a shift from a 'Fordist' regime of political economy and governance to a 'post-Fordist' one (Jessop, 1995). The former is associated with the growth of large-scale corporate organizations with hierarchical and bureaucratic management structures, welfare states and associated professional knowledges at the service of corporate and state interests. In contrast, the 'post-Fordist' regime is understood in terms of flexible specialization and flatter managerial structures, the decline of state-centred welfare programmes and the rise of the 'knowledge economy' (Thrift, 2005). In this context, universities are seen as a vehicle of national economic development and become subject to government policies designed to enhance their contribution to such national goals (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997; Marginson and Considine, 2000; Bok, 2003).

If the distinction between Fordism and post-Fordism is overdrawn, it helps to provide focus on different kinds of knowledge claims and their social conditions and also to identify particular 'risks' within the current environment of higher education. I shall argue three things: first, that the prognosis for sociology is not good; second, that the threats to sociology are potentially damaging to the wider system of social science disciplines; and, third, that problems of disciplinary identity make it difficult for us both to recognize and act upon the risks that we face. This all takes place in a context where other commentators are celebratory of the implications of post-Fordism for the rise of new 'polycentric sociologies' perceived as a significant advance on earlier 'positivist' understandings by, *inter alia*, undermining the implicit hegemony of expert knowledge; involving a greater recognition of reflexivity; a relaxation of boundary-work across disciplines; and a greater plurality of perspectives within sociology. In this way, it is argued, the new sensibility encourages a reflexive perception of the discipline as critically engaged, critical of its own claims for authority and engaged with the (potentially different) claims of others (see Steinmetz, 2005).

Another who has written in an optimistic tone (albeit cautiously), Burawoy (2005) has recently proposed a typology of sociological activities constructed on two dimensions: one of knowledge claims (instrumental versus reflexive), and the other of orientation (whether to an academic or an external audience). This provides four types of activity: (1) 'professional sociology' (instrumental, academic) (2) 'critical sociology' (reflexive, academic); (3) 'policy sociology' (instrumental, external); and (4) 'public sociology' (reflexive, external).[1] For Burawoy, the different sociologies are mutually necessary. My claim is that sociology is in the process of being undermined in both its professional and its critical forms. While there are commentators (most usually from the perspective of critical theory) who perceive the decline of the other side as evidence for the triumph of their preferred position, I shall suggest that what is most evident is the decline of both. In this context, Burawoy might be correct that the future of sociology might depend upon recognition of a common fate by practitioners of both sensibilities, but there are good sociological reasons why we should not be sanguine about that prospect.

Although my article draws upon the UK context of higher education. I believe that the argument has relevance elsewhere. However, I do not argue that the processes are uniform and convergent. Some of these reasons are familiar from Abbott's arguments about

the 'chaotic' formation of disciplines (Abbott, 2001) and the non-convergent development of professions (Abbott, 1988), and I will discuss them further below. However, this poses serious dilemmas for theory and for practice and it is reflection upon these dilemmas that has motivated the writing of this article. How do we think about the condition of sociology and its possible future(s) once we understand disciplinary development as a product of internal tendencies and external conditions that unfold different paths of possible development? How do we engage with others – in our own and in allied subjects – over significant risks in higher education when there is no reason for the same external conditions to have the same consequences in different disciplines, and no reason for the same discipline in different (national) contexts to have a convergent development?

One simple example will suffice. If some within sociology witness the decline of 'professional sociology' with equanimity, might those outside sociology in other disciplines witness the decline of critical sociology and professional sociology alike with similar equanimity? After all, it has been a common refrain within economics that there is a single 'economic' approach to society that is awaiting recognition (Hirshleifer, 1985) and, therefore, from that perspective, we might now be witnessing that moment. From that perspective, what I argue to be the problematic displacement of professional and critical sociologies by applied social studies, might, in fact, simply be the emergence of an analytical social science organized under predominantly economic categories, alongside its supplement of applied policy studies.

More seriously, if we cannot persuade ourselves of the threats, how might we persuade others? I suggest that there are three ways in which our perception of the threats is diminished. They are interconnected and together they provide a powerful reinforcement of collective complacency. The first is the argument that any claim that there is a crisis is a conservative response to a loss of professional hegemony. The second is the argument that 'crisis claims' are part of the normal language of sociological argument and, therefore, any claim that we have now entered a period of crisis is a reassuring indication of the opposite, namely 'business as usual'. The third response involves the valorization of interdisciplinarity and a preference for the transgression of boundaries, rather than their maintenance. I shall suggest that the latter is frequently articulated without a close examination of the substance of what passes for interdisciplinary social studies. I shall deal with these responses in turn.

Sociology as profession

Burawoy's account of differentiated sociological activities includes identification of an earlier period of sociology when it was similarly plural in its orientation, if less clearly differentiated. However, in the 1940s and 1950s, he suggests that there were attempts to 'purify' the discipline in terms of a project of professionalization concerned to establish sociological theory as a coherent framework of categories that could be the basis of empirical research.

However, those who promoted a project of professional sociology were articulating it in the 'future perfect' tense. They did not so much describe the current state of sociology, but a moment of coming into being of a kind of sociology whose realization is anticipated at the same time as it is being described. Thus, Merton's (1968 [1949]) essay

on the history and systematics of theory, containing, as it did, the idea that sociological theory had transcended its reliance upon individualized contributions (the historical canon of 'unforgotten founders') and had become truly general and collective, was not describing the present situation, but a situation that Merton believed was both needed and coming into being. Parsons's (1954 [1950]) essay on the prospects of sociological theory professed more certainty about the project being underway, but it had a similar character. For him, sociology was no longer, 'about to begin. It has been gathering force for a generation and is now really under way' (1954 [1950]: 369). For Parsons, this was a sociology that would be both deeply theoretical and empirical, finally integrating these levels and their associated fields. There were also major statements, such as that of Lazarsfeld and Rosenberg (1955), setting out the nature of formal, empirical theory in terms of principles of research design concerning the different dimensions of a phenomenon and their indicators in social research, as a project that could integrate different fields of empirical research. It is precisely these confident, authoritative statements that became associated with the high point of disciplinary formation and 'profession-making', especially in the United States.[2]

The dominant perception that informed the move to professionalization in the US in the post-1945 period was that Western societies had entered a period characterized by an 'end of ideology' (Bell, 1960). The defining ideological conflicts of early capitalism – essentially, between a bourgeois ideology of 'radical individualism' and a socialist ideology of 'collectivism' – had, it was argued, lost their relevance in the 'mixed' and affluent economies and pluralistic political systems of modern industrial societies. As one of the foremost commentators on these developments, Daniel Bell, put it,

> In the Western world . . . there is a rough consensus among intellectuals on political issues: the acceptance of a Welfare State; the desirability of decentralized power; a system of mixed economy and of political pluralism. In that sense . . . the ideological age has ended. (1960: 402–3)

For some commentators – though not, it must be stressed, for Bell, himself – it seemed that, with the end of the ideological age, political discourse could be reduced to issues of technical and professional expertise and the determination of public opinion through mass media and advertising.[3] This also expressed an increased demand for social scientific expertise that, as part of the political policy process associated with a growing welfare state, sustained the growth and professionalization of social science, especially in the USA (Turner and Turner, 1990).

For Steinmetz (2005: 294), this was the moment of the Fordist regulation of the economy, in which mass production and mass consumption came together with Keynesian management of the economy to secure long-term stability and welfare policies that socialized part of the costs of reproducing labour power. According to Steinmetz,

> Fordism helped to forge a form of social science that was acultural, ahistorical, and individualist with respect to its basic units of analysis and oriented toward general laws, replication, prediction and value freedom. The Fordist security state drew heavily on social knowledge packaged in a positivist format and pumped massive amounts of money into research organized in this way. (Steinmetz, 2005: 309)

From this perspective, however, the regulation of the contradictions of the capitalist economy could only be temporary and would soon give way to a new economic and social crisis that could not be contained within the same regime and this would necessarily destabilize the sociological 'settlement', too.

While the forward projection of professionalized sociology was a significant factor in intellectual developments across the 1960s and 1970s, so, too, was the emergence of alternative positions contesting the intellectual hegemony that was being claimed. Mill's (1959) articulation of a sociological imagination in contrast to the rule of general theory or abstract empiricism was the first of a series of critiques of the 'wished for' professional hegemony, which culminated in Gouldner's (1970) *Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*. The latter's apostasy was all the greater than that of Mills since he had been part of the putative mainstream and had turned against it, rather than someone resisting the professionalization of the discipline from a position seemingly in the process of being left behind (as had frequently been charged against Mills).

Steinmetz associates the rise of critical sociologies in the 1970s with the rise of new social movements that were challenging the Fordist settlement (and its ideological quietude), for example, feminism, gay rights, postcolonialism and other components of a new left. Thus, he writes that, 'the challenges to methodological positivism in the late 1960s and 1970s can be seen as a sort of intellectual pendant to the broader rejection of Fordist homogenization by the first wave of "new social movements" in that same era' (2005: 310).

In this way, then, sociology, at least in the 1950s and after, can be presented in terms both of a drive toward intellectual dominance and professional hegemony and of emerging self-critique and tendencies toward fragmentation. In so far as it is the latter that has come to pass, the present situation now appears to be little different from earlier periods of sociological formation prior to the 1950s and 1960s and, thus, facilitates the comforting view that, in truth, nothing really has changed and it is a focus upon the 1950s and 1960s that distorts our perspective. Indeed, Steinmetz suggests that Gouldner's prediction in the 1970s that, 'U.S. sociology would move through a period of crisis characterized by the collapse of theoretical hegemony to a less positivist and more reflexive polycentrism might then turn out to be correct, if premature' (2005: 311–12). It has, he suggests, finally come to pass. However, even if the perceived fragmentation of current sociology would not be distinctive, what would be distinctive in the present is the dissipation of any drive to professional hegemony.

In this way, those who promote the idea that sociology has entered a crisis are perceived as being nostalgic for a past project of professional hegemony, which as Steinmetz (2005) suggests, coincided with a Fordist regime of capitalist governance that was only temporary. Commenting in the US context, Burawoy (2005) refers to the tendency for many sceptical commentators on the state of sociology to lament its decline and fragmentation when all that has happened is that sociology has been opened up to new voices (see, also, Stanley, 2005). There is considerable merit to these arguments, and 'declinism' is certainly a feature of those commentaries discussed by Burawoy (see, for example, Horowitz, 1994; Stinchcombe, 1994). However, they do not capture the nature of my own concern, which is not to reassert a professional hegemony, nor to lament a past that never properly existed, but rather to identify a crisis in the reproduction

of the very polycentric sociologies embraced by Burawoy and Steinmetz. I now want to explore some further aspects of the idea of 'crisis' and its association with the polycentric nature of sociology as a discipline.

Sociology and crisis

In this section of the article, I want to set out how the idea of 'crisis' in sociology is associated with ideas of critique and also to consider how this creates a particular sensibility for the discipline, expressing its polycentric character. However, I suggest that this sensibility involves the normalization of 'crisis talk' and, thus, makes it difficult to mount a defence of that very polycentrism when it is at risk. I shall argue that the idea of crisis is important within sociology as part of three (related) modes of critique: first, 'internal' critique of sociology and its various tendencies; second, 'external' critiques of other disciplines, thereby constituting sociology as a discipline engaged in, what I shall call, 'critical interdisciplinarity' and; third, the critique of society.

The idea of polycentric sociologies necessarily implies that they will be defined by mutual relationships of criticism and self-definition through contrast and opposition. Indeed, Weber observed that the emerging discipline of sociology was characterized by dissension, rather than by agreement, and he decried, 'the continuous changes and bitter conflict about the apparently most elementary problems of our discipline, its methods, the formulation and validity of its concepts' (1949 [1904]: 51). More recently, Abbott's (2001) account of the chaos of disciplinary formation in terms of 'fractal' cycles – or sequences of 'self-similar structures' produced by splitting and recombination – both describes the situation of dissension and seeks to normalize it. The 'ferment' that many see in our own times, he argues, is not peculiar, rather 'ferment is old, and, in its own way, quite regular' (2005: 121).

The different elements that are combined in different fractals of sociology, according to Abbott, are familiar enough. They are the components of the dualisms evident in other accounts of sociology's divided paradigms and epistemologies; namely, structure/agency, positivism/idealism, etc. Different sub-fields and paradigms (say, Marxism) will demonstrate cyclical development in terms of an emphasis on structure rather than agency, followed by attempts to bring agency into structure. Even approaches that are seemingly committed to a singular position (what Abbott calls an 'extremal logic'), say, rational actor approaches, will reveal splitting over the role of, say, norms, with some seeking incorporation and others exclusion. Processes of differentiation, de-differentiation and combination, do not proceed at the same pace, or in terms of the same stages of the cycle in different sub-fields, but, nonetheless cycles of fractal splitting characterize a general process.

Ironically, this has something in common with Parsons's (1937) account of different sociological traditions, their internal differentiations and combinations of positive and residual elements.[4] Where the latter looked for an overarching synthesis of categories (of which Abbott is rightly sceptical), Abbott's description of the categories, as both 'universalistic' and 'chaotic' (in the specific sense of the idea from complexity theory), retains the form of Parsons's (1937: 733) account of the 'phenomenological status' of the categories, without the latter's argument that they can be resolved into a coherent

overarching framework. There is, as Abbott puts it, a common pattern in the way that the different sociologies interact, but no common basis to the different knowledges they represent that would allow their synthesis; rather there is ‘a universal knowledge upon whose terrain the local knowledges wander’ (2001: 4).

Given that Abbott argues that the different sociologies that exist within a sociological field of high fractal dimension cannot be integrated, one of their characteristics is mutual opposition and even denial. A familiar feature of sociological debate, then, is that the different sociologies frequently declare other sociologies as misconceived, or ‘impossible’. Thus, Marxist sociologists declared that other sociologies are a reflection of bourgeois ideologies and not proper sciences (see, for example, Therborn, 1976, Hindess, 1977), while ethnomethodologists declared sociology to be impossible on other grounds and declared their ‘indifference’ to its constructive project (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970), and others declared sociological (‘systematic’) empiricism not to constitute a proper science, but an ideology (Willer and Willer, 1973). However, the important feature of these arguments – something that follows from Abbott’s analysis – is that they cannot themselves be reproduced except that sociology itself is also reproduced (even in the minimum sense that it is departments of sociology that provide employment).

The second of my claims is that sociology has a special relationship to interdisciplinarity, different from that of other disciplines. This derives from arguments about how sociology emerged as a discipline. Habermas, for example, writes that, ‘sociology originated as discipline responsible for the problems that politics and economics pushed to one side on their way to becoming specialized sciences’ (1984 [1981]: 4). The statement from Habermas sets sociology in relation to economics and politics and identifies sociology as having a special relationship to these disciplines, different from their relation to each other (and by implication their own perception of their relation to sociology).[5] The implication is that sociology carries within itself a certain critical interdisciplinarity, in so far as those ‘problems’ that define sociology’s disciplinary field continue to have the implications of their disciplinary origins and cannot simply be ‘annexed’ to a new specialized discipline of sociology. This is partly because those problems need not have a stable relationship within the other disciplines, but, more importantly because sociology itself does not have a ‘settled’ character.

In fact, Habermas’s argument reproduces a similar argument by Parsons who also saw sociology emerging in relation to what he called the ‘residual’ problems of other disciplines and also singled out economics for special treatment.[6] However, given Parsons’s concerns to translate residual categories into positive categories, his orientation was precisely to seek a settled form of interdisciplinarity where each discipline was defined by an analytically specified object domain within a single frame of reference. In this way, Parsons’s aim to ‘purify’ the discipline of sociology was to be carried through in terms of identifying its place in the wider social sciences. However, if the argument about sociology’s polycentrism is correct, then its corollary of internal critique necessarily means that sociology’s relationships with other disciplines cannot, from its own perspective, be stabilized. Sociology’s disciplinary mode of ‘self-critique’ necessarily entails ‘critical interdisciplinarity’. This, I suggest, explains why sociology’s disciplinary identity is strongly associated with interdisciplinarity, and, thus, why appeals to maintain disciplinary identity are frequently seen as problematic.

Finally, I want to consider the claim that sociology emerges in relation to social crisis. Once again, this idea can be introduced by reference to Habermas. He writes that sociology is both a product of crisis, and that it 'became the science of crisis par excellence; it concerned itself with the anomic aspects of the dissolution of traditional social systems and the development of modern ones' (1984 [1981]: 4). Whereas attempts to purify the discipline in terms of a professional orthodoxy seek to locate problems as internal to its concepts and research framework, this argument suggests that those concepts and research orientations are also externally derived in a critical relation to social problems. It is not merely that polycentric sociologies will be internally disputatious and interdisciplinary, they will also be externally engaged.[7] Thus, both Burawoy and Steinmetz suggest that this was a characteristic of sociology prior to claims to a professionalized discipline emerging in the 1950s and also that the breakdown of professional hegemony was associated with the rise of new social movements and how they challenged an existing social and political consensus. Sociology, then, frequently takes its problems from outside and is subject to renewal on that basis, as occurred with the impact of feminism and other social movements.

However, in what follows, I shall suggest that there is indeed a crisis associated with changed conditions of the production of sociological knowledge in the shift from a Fordist to a post-Fordist knowledge economy. This crisis is not peculiar in having effects only upon sociology as a discipline, but its implications are far-reaching, given the perceived critical role of sociology in the articulation of social scientific knowledge and in terms of its engagement with wider social problems (and not simply those favoured by government agencies). What is missing from accounts of the polycentric nature of sociology, I suggest, is the displacement not only of modernist, professional sociology, but also of critical social theory, by the rise of a different kind of interdisciplinarity from the critical interdisciplinarity that I have discussed, namely applied, problem-focused social studies. This, I suggest, is the legacy of the post-Fordist knowledge economy and the final triumph of instrumental reason. It is to this that I now turn.

Critical interdisciplinarity versus interdisciplinary applied social studies

Critics of the idea of a professional hegemony, such as Burawoy, suggest that critical sociology and professional sociology are mutually dependent, where, 'the flourishing of each type of sociology is a condition of the flourishing of all' (2005: 4). The question that must be posed is whether the social conditions of knowledge production in post-Fordism encourage the flourishing of sociological knowledge in any of its forms. As Steinmetz allows, the social movements that were crucial to the development of polycentric sociologies and which arose in criticism of the Fordist regime also resonate with the latter's successor regime of a 'flexible and information-centred world of the post-Fordist "new economy"' (2005: 311). This is a theme that has also been developed by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2005 [1999]). For them, the cultural critiques associated with new social movements have been absorbed by post-Fordist capitalism to be part of the renewal both of worlds of work and of consumption in the creation of a 'new spirit of capitalism' that legitimates a new neo-liberal, market-oriented regime of governance.

If the critical momentum of social critiques can be defused and absorbed to the reproduction of a new capitalist knowledge economy, it must at least pose the question of whether the new critical sociologies might also share the same fate and if their critical capacity is less than their advocates suppose. This is a question that neither Boltanski and Chiapello, nor Steinmetz ask. For the former, the critical space of the academy appears unchanged across Fordist and post-Fordist regimes, or, at least, they do not address how it may have been transformed despite their object of study including the management texts produced within university business schools (one of the domains of interdisciplinary, applied social studies). For Steinmetz, for his part, there is a distinct possibility that methodological positivism can be recuperated in the forms of governance characteristic of post-Fordism, and it is, 'still an open question whether this form of governance will rely to the same extent as its predecessor on positivist forms of social science' (2005: 313). I shall argue that the question is less open than Steinmetz suggests and that positivist forms of social science are indeed reproduced, albeit without a legitimating façade of professional modes of justification. However, I shall also suggest that this occurs in the form of a rise of applied (and interdisciplinary) social studies and the displacement of sociology. This displacement is brought about in part by the reorganization of knowledge production, but it is also facilitated by the mode of internal critique within sociology.

The developments associated with post-Fordism have been discussed by other writers in terms of their impact upon knowledge production, even if they do not use the language of post-Fordism. The perception of the increasing integration of university research and economic goals has given rise to a new emphasis upon the 'co-production' of knowledge (Jasanoff, 2004). This is also captured by Gibbons and Novotny and their colleagues (Gibbons et al., 1994; Novotny et al., 2001) in their argument that the university is no longer the privileged space for research. This follows from the increased marketability of knowledge with concomitant commercial investment in its production, and government concerns about maintaining effective investment in research and development. They refer to these developments as a shift from what they call 'mode one knowledge production' to a new 'mode two knowledge production'. The former corresponds to a conventional view of research, based within universities and organized around disciplines. In the latter, knowledge production is increasingly transdisciplinary and is part of a 'larger process in which discovery, application and use are closely integrated' (Gibbbons et al., 1994, 46; see also, Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004; Caswill and Wensley, 2007). In their view, mode two knowledge will not necessarily supplant mode one knowledge; rather, both will co-exist and interact.

Just as the idea that sociology in the past was defined by an orthodox consensus is problematic, so too is the idea of a clear demarcation between a Fordist model of professionalized, disciplinary knowledge and that of a post-Fordist model of flexible knowledge. The breakdown of disciplinary knowledge and of the university as a 'self-contained' and privileged site of knowledge production was already evident in the expansion of higher education in the 1960s. At the same time, the post-war expansion of the universities in the 1960s also coincided with their greater 'democratization' and the transformation from elite-based to mass education, creating the conditions in which universities were perceived not just in their role as contributors to economic growth, but also to wider social values.

Indeed, for a number of commentators (Turner and Turner, 1990), it was precisely the expansion of higher education in the 1960s that created the conditions for the emergence of dissident sociologies because of easy access to new job opportunities outside the control of disciplinary 'gatekeepers'. In France, the hierarchical relation between the Grandes Écoles and the universities, with its consequences for the recruitment and social position of 'cadres' was seen as a major contributing factor in student disturbances in 1968 (see Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005 [1999]). It was also a feature of the initial impetus of science studies as a challenge to the 'authority' of science outside its limited domain of expertise. In this context, advocates of science studies saw themselves as 'representatives' of a wider public (see Guggenheim and Novotny, 2003).

Although 'mode two' knowledge was not named as such, much more than professionalized, disciplinary knowledge, it was the object of Gouldner's animus in the 1970s. The failure of professional social science and its doctrine of value freedom, for him, was its misunderstanding of the nature of the threat to the university as a space for critical reflection. The threat came from commercialization, not from politicization (which had been the object of Weber's concern), and the professional doctrine of value freedom served commercialization precisely because of its silence on instrumental uses of knowledge. Professional hostility to the politicization of knowledge meant that it was mute in the face of the very economic developments that were damaging universities as a space for critical self-reflection about societies. As Gouldner puts it:

> The University's central problem is its failure as a community in which rational discourse about social worlds is possible. This is partly because rational discourse as such has ceased to be its dominant value and was superseded by a quest for knowledge products and information products that could be sold or promised for funding, prestige and power – rewards bestowed by the state and larger society that is most bent upon subverting rational discourse about itself. (1973: 79)

From this perspective, then, Steinmetz and Burawoy conflate professional knowledge and instrumentalized knowledge – that is mode one and mode two knowledges. Their focus upon the failings of professional knowledge misses the growth of mode two knowledge across the same period. Even if we regard the contemporary university as formed in the interplay of both modes, the balance between them has shifted significantly. Indeed, the move from a Fordist to a post-Fordist regime has profoundly affected the mode of the governance of higher education, which, in turn, has encouraged the expansion of mode two knowledge (see Holmwood, 2010). The neo-liberal preference for the market has its corollary in the expansion of audit measures to assess university performance. Public bodies and universities alike become subject to the techniques of the new public management (Dunleavy and Hood, 1993; Barzelay, 2000; Lane, 2000), itself a product of the mode two knowledege developed within business schools. These techniques 'flatten' the differences between mode 1 and mode 2 knowledges and encourage the 'commodification' of knowledge which facilitates the growth of the latter. Indeed, Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000) have suggested that this has meant that the very distinction between the two modes of knowledge is increasingly problematic, in so far as it depends upon forms of interchange among bounded entities while those very

boundaries are becoming less distinct. In their place, they propose a 'triple helix model' of university, industry and the state, in which differentiated boundaries are more permeable where

> the'endless frontier' of basic research funded as an end in itself, with only long-term practical results expected, is being replaced by an 'endless transition' model in which basic research is linked to utilization through a series of intermediate processes ... often stimulated by government. (2000: 110)

In essence, then, the development of post-Fordism has been associated not with the reinforcement of the differentiations initially posited by Parsons, but by 'de-differentiation'.[8] The consequence has not been a democratization of expertise – Gouldner's concern in his critique of professional knowledge – but an attempt to make it subject to market processes (or their audit proxies). As Boltanski and Chiapello suggest, the critique of hierarchy and the emphasis on autonomy which were so much part of the social movements of the 1960s have become readily transformed into the idea of the consumer into which students have become transfigured. The contemporary university, then, is one in which mode two knowledge increasingly predominates and is enjoined both by government policy and by university managers seeking to maximize university performance in raising external income and within the various audits which generate rank orders (in terms of which managerial performance is measured).

This is the context of Savage and Burrows's (2007) recent argument that empirical sociology is in crisis, occasioned by the increased capacity for research by private companies and the proliferation of data available to them (and not university-based sociologists) generated by electronic transactions in the knowledge economy. This has undermined standard tools of empirical sociology, such as the 'sample survey' because, 'where data on whole populations are routinely gathered as a by-product of institutional transactions, the sample survey seems a very poor instrument' (2007: 891). They also suggest that this has had an impact upon qualitative methods that have emerged as a staple of British empirical sociology over the last few decades. They argue that the rationale for the use of a small number of in-depth interviews was to demonstrate the complexity of everyday views of class and community when compared with a dominant functionalist account of reference groups, norms and values (Savage and Burrows 2007: 894). However, with the demise of functionalism, this rationale is now past its 'sell by date'. In the absence of a new rationale,

> Not only are the world-views of diverse populations now routinely presented to us in the popular and new media in such a manner that their summary characterization by sociologists is no longer as necessary (or as interesting) as it once was, but some of the social transactional research technologies discussed above are now also able to produce nuanced representations of the lifeworlds of quite specific populations groupings, for example. (Savage and Burrows, 2007: 894–5)

Of course, sociological research remains relevant to a significant number of areas of public policy, but here it is in competition with research produced by 'Think Tanks' and private research companies and it is also shaped by government policy objectives. Where

the Fordist regime might have expressed an interest in evidence-based policy, the trend is increasing toward research that takes as given the policy aims of government. Increasingly, this research is undertaken not within conventionally organized departments of sociology, but as a form of applied social studies in interdisciplinary departments and in a wider context of an expanding private market to supply the same 'knowledge products'.

Interdisciplinary applied social studies and the critique of sociology

In general, Abbott's account of the chaos of disciplines is not engaged with debates within the sociology of science over the co-production of knowledge and the relation between mode one and mode two knowledges. He sets for himself a rigorously 'internalist' account of disciplinary dynamics. However, he does address the context of disciplines, and what he calls the 'disciplinary system', in one chapter, where the issues raised by mode two knowledges are addressed, if only obliquely. Abbott acknowledges that one of the striking features of the post-war development of the academy has been the emergence of increasing numbers of academic staff and research and teaching centres devoted to applied, interdisciplinary studies. On the one hand, for Abbott, once again, this is also an 'old', not a 'new' story (2001: 131), despite its recent promotion by funding agencies and university policy-makers and despite the fact that there has been an 'interdisciplinary bonanza' since 1960 (2001: 133).

Part of the reason that Abbott is sanguine is that interdisciplinary work is 'problem-driven', and 'problem-oriented empirical work does not create enduring, self-reproducing communities like disciplines except in areas with stable and strongly institutionalized clienteles like criminology' (2001: 133). Moreover, disciplines retain hierarchy over applied interdisciplinary areas such that the latter recruit from disciplines and are not themselves self-recruiting. Disciplines are repositories of 'problem-portable' knowledge, and 'the reality is that problem-based knowledge is insufficiently abstract to survive in competition with problem-portable knowledge' (2001: 135).

Yet this argument seems weak on two grounds. The first is that interdisciplinary areas do not straightforwardly accept their hierarchical subordination to their disciplinary superiors. Indeed, Novotny et al. (2003) suggest that their identification of mode two knowledges has been used 'politically', writing that

> those with most to gain from such a thesis espoused it most warmly – politicians and civil servants struggling to create better mechanisms to link science with innovation; researchers in professional disciplines such as management, struggling to wriggle out from under the condescension of more established, and more 'academic', disciplines. (2003: 179).[9]

Moreover, as we shall see, some of the ammunition used in such battles has been manufactured within sociology as part of the claims to pre-eminence of a particular sub-field or sociological position. The very fact that sociology is characterized by internal critique makes those critiques available to be used in moves that re-position sub-fields within interdisciplinary applied social studies. For example, the promotion of science and

technology studies in business schools is associated with a critique of mainstream sociology and the insufficient recognition of STS within it (see, Woolgar et al., 2009). It may be the case, as Abbott suggests, that a problem-based academic system would be ‘hopelessly duplicative’ (2001: 135), but this does not mean that there is an absence of will to bring it into being on the part of policy-makers, in which they are likely to find academic allies.[10] To argue otherwise, would seem to depend upon an implicit functionalism, that efficient knowledge production must win out over the inefficient.

The second problem is that precisely because he has not addressed the nature of any possible differences among social science disciplines, Abbott is unable to address their respective abilities to maintain disciplinary dominance over applied interdisciplinary fields.[11] The implication of his argument, for example, is that economics differs from sociology by virtue of being a discipline with low fractal dimension.[12] The latter characteristic, for example, would provide a more unified disciplinary identity. Even if some of the other characteristics of the organization of a discipline with low fractal dimension would not be to our taste, it would have greater capacity to maintain the kind of hierarchical dominance that Abbott associates with disciplines. However, as I have already argued, as well as having a weak disciplinary identity, sociology is also a discipline that celebrates polycentrism and porous boundaries in terms of a conception of ‘critical interdisciplinarity’, where its practitioners are disinclined to assert hierarchy.

In this context, it is significant that Abbott’s own differentiation of sociology from applied, interdisciplinary studies is also weak. He begins the book with a statement that is tantamount to an admission that sociology has a low degree of disciplinary identity. Thus, he argues that his theoretical account applies to social science in general, and to sociology in particular (20015: 3), and then that he writes about sociology, ‘partly because it is my own discipline. But it is also the most general of the social sciences, or, to put it less politely, the *least defined*’ (2001: 3; my emphasis). However, the problem is that the greater generality of sociology makes it particularly difficult to distinguish it from interdisciplinary subject areas (since social sciences like economics and politics provide the disciplinary self-identity that allow them to distinguish themselves from sociology). Thus, he writes:

> Sociology has become a discipline of many topics – always acquiring them, seldom losing them ... Sociology, in short is irredeemably interstitial. In fact, this interstitiality is what undergirds sociology’s claims as a general social science, claims not necessarily justified by its contributions in theory, method, or substance. Rather, sociology’s claim as the most general social science rests on its implicit and fuddled claim that ‘no form of knowledge [about society] is alien to it’. (2001: 6)[13]

This suggests that sociology is the most general precisely because, compared to, say, economics or psychology, it has high fractal dimension, or, in Steinmetz’s terms, because it is’polycentric’. In other words, while disciplines are defined as the repository of abstract, problem-portable knowledge, there are degrees of abstraction, and sociology is the most general. Although he suggests that generality is associated with ‘problem portable’ knowledge, he also casts doubt on that ‘portability’ in the case of sociology precisely in so far as he allows that sociology’s claims to generality are not necessarily

justified in terms of theory, method or substance. At the same time, this 'generality' is also associated with 'high fractal dimension', which suggests that a 'polycentric' discipline may have difficulty in maintaining itself precisely because it lacks a conception of disciplinary identity sufficient to protect its distinctiveness from threats at its boundaries, and in the wider environment, that reinforce problem-based knowledge. The problem is two-fold. What distinguishes sociology is potentially too general to be a source of useful exemplars, while its concepts and methods, as Savage and Burrows also argue, are no longer distinctive.[14]

In this context there emerges a curious inversion where interdisciplinary areas appear to undergo a form of professionalization, as a corollary of denying the hegemony of disciplines. Thus, Guggenheim and Novotny (2003) suggest that the field of science and technology studies (STS) is in urgent need of disciplinary development and professionalization. However, their proposal entails

> the capability to select problems for their own – scientific and intellectual – sake and to transform them into research priorities which are seen as collective, and not simply as an individual task. It also implies the willingness and capability to transmit the relevance of scientific activities to a wider audience and perhaps even to one's 'clients'. (2003: 231)

What is being proposed is the creation of STS as a form of mode one knowledge, but one that is immediately given meaning by its hierarchical association with mode two knowledge, where its practitioners are to be conceived as professional experts mediating scientists, government and public.[15] Just as in earlier critiques of the professional project in wider sociology, Woolgar (2004) has suggested that this 'translation' across disciplinary boundaries has potentially meant a loss in the power of STS to 'provoke'. Where, initially, STS represented a provocation to philosophers of science and 'conventional' sociologists, it is now engaged in the co-production of knowledge with users (see Woolgar et al., 2009).

However, it is not simply that STS represents itself as a new 'professional' discipline, but that it also presents itself as the successor to sociology. In this context, the tendency for sociology to be characterized by internal critiques of its 'impossibility', becomes translated into an external critique of its 'impossibility'. Where internal arguments of the impossibility of sociology depended upon the latter for their reproduction, this new version can be reproduced, precisely in so far as it is embedded in a new mode two knowledge.

This position has also been emphatically articulated in actor-network theory (Latour, 2005). What is attacked are the (supposed) constitutive categories of sociology, namely, founding distinctions between nature and society, and non-humans and human. Thus, Latour argues that the 'social' is not an explanatory category, rather the 'social' is a co-production to be accounted for in terms of the networks and practices that find it necessary to lay claim to it and produce it. The 'social' is neither available as an unproblematic repertoire of explanatory concepts for sociologists, nor something that can be established as the ground of critique. The capacity to 'provoke' may remain, but only in terms of the continuing critique of 'conventional' sociology, now represented as being only conventionally 'critical'. STS becomes the successor science to sociology, on the

basis of its integration with mode two knowledge production and sets itself the task of the ethnographic description of social worlds produced by networks.

In this way, then, an important current of contemporary social inquiry, associated by Steinmetz with its 'polycentrism', lays claim to the domain of mainstream sociological concerns, but in a way that displaces sociology. However, the critique of sociology makes the approach (in its different forms) well suited to applied social studies, where that critique also serves the 'local' interest in challenging disciplinary hegemony. In fact, the very character of mode two knowledges as 'co-produced' makes approaches which tend to argue that all knowledge is co-produced, whether that be mode two or mode one knowledge, peculiarly suited to the task of legitimation. The fact that these approaches are now indifferent to critique – except the critique of disciplines from the perspective of non-critical interdisciplinarity – means that they pose little challenge to the structure of interests within the knowledge economy.[16]

The 'ethnographic' turn associated with these developments is strongly associated with the turn to description, identified by Savage and Burrows (2007) and further elaborated by Savage (2009) in a recent special issue of the *European Journal of Social Theory*. Where previously professional sociology had been criticized for systematic empiricism (Willer and Willer, 1973), this 'new empiricism' is avowedly 'unsystematic'. As such, it lays claim to the social world as complex and contradictory, to be described in its particularity. Where sociological empiricism had previously been criticized for its emphasis on regularities and prediction, the new empiricism eschews explanation. 'Descriptive' sociology – truly, interdisciplinary social studies – would follow the 'agents' (human and non-human), but, by that token, it would not itself be an agent in the knowledge system. At best, it would offer other agents a better self-understanding of the processes in which they were embedded, but it gives up on the possibility of critique. If the new networks of knowledge production are themselves to be likened to a caravanseray, then 'descriptive' social inquiry is no longer part of it, but is an onlooker at the scene and a teller of travellers' tales.

Conclusion

This article has addressed the prospects and possibilities of sociology in a post-Fordist knowledge regime. The conclusion is that the most likely consequence is neither the reproduction of a professional core, or of polycentric, self-reflective critical sociologies, but the expansion of the mode two knowledge of applied social studies. Once sociological interests in explanation and critique are denied, all that remains is to serve the interests of our 'co-producers'. The post-Fordist university is the university of 'applied (social) studies' and its promotion is the unwitting consequence of some of the critiques of professional knowledge. Something of the language of criticism remains, but it is now girded to the 'instrumentalization' of knowledge and it expresses a scepticism toward other values for the university as being an expression of elitist or hegemonic projects. I suggest that, in this context, critique itself has become a form of mystification in what Horkheimer might have been moved to describe as a new 'double eclipse' of reason. The first eclipse occurs in the promotion of instrumental knowledge against critical knowledges, and the second eclipse in the way in which critique comes to serve the instrumentalization of knowledge.

Acknowledgements

The arguments of this article were first presented at the European Sociological Association, Social Theory Conference in Prague, 9–11 September 2010. Thanks to the participants at that conference and to Gurminder K. Bhambra, Frank Welz and Jan Balon for their comments. I am also grateful to the Leverhulme Trust for a research fellowship during which this article was written and for the Institute of Sociology at the Academy of Sciences in Prague for hosting me as a visitor during the writing of the article.

Notes

1. See Holmwood (2007) for a detailed discussion of Burawoy's arguments for a public sociology and Holmwood (2010) for discussion of the impact of audit culture.
2. Steinmetz exempts Parsons and the early Merton (but not the later Merton of 'middle-range theory'), from what he regards as an emerging positivist orthodoxy. However, he regards them as part of an increasingly 'settled field', where, 'a settled field is internally heterogeneous but at the same time biased toward a shared definition of distinction' (2005: 287). Thus, while Parsons emphasized the role of general theory, he was no less concerned to stress the importance of 'the "fitting" of theory to operational procedures of research and, vice versa, the adaption of the latter to theoretical needs' (1954 [1950]: 351). This was what became the orthodoxy and Parsons contributed to it, even if it was not precisely what he intended.
3. The significance of the argument about the 'end of ideology' is found not least in its repetition by postmodern theorists. Thus, Lyotard identifies an end to 'grand narrative' and associates it with similar social conditions to those identified by Bell, writing that it is

   > an effect of the blossoming of techniques and technologies since the Second World War, which has shifted emphasis from the ends of action to its means; it can be seen as an effect of the redeployment of advanced liberal capitalism after its repeat under the protection of Keynesianism during the period 1930–60, a renewal that has eliminated the communist alternative and valorized the individual enjoyment of goods' (1984 [1979]: 37–8)

   In this way, the 'end of ideology' is associated both with Fordism and post-Fordism.
4. Thus the first chapters of Parsons's (1937) The *Structure of Social Action* describe a kind of 'fractal' splitting within the positivist theory of action and also between positivism and idealism and within idealism alike. Collins (2002: 231), for his part, makes the observation that Parsons's A-G-I-L scheme has the characteristic of describing 'self-similar' structures.
5. Thus, in economics the idea that problems may be assigned to sociology elicits the usual response that they could be reabsorbed to economics by some improvement in its analytical framework, as in Hirshleifer's (1985) argument of a single economic science of society that awaits development.
6. There are similarities, too, with Burawoy's (2005) argument about public sociology and the fact that he sets sociology in terms of its relationship to politics and economics.
7. This does not mean that all sociologies will be externally engaged, simply that some of them will be and that that engagement will be a critical issue in the relation among the different sociologies, whether engaged or not.

8. It is not too far-fetched to say that (without using the term) Parsons was, first and foremost, a theorist of mode one knowledges.
9. A similar 'institutional' argument is made by Etzkowitz, and Leydesdorff (2000), who also suggest that the 'triple helix' model of knowledge production is particularly suited to less-elite universities in their struggle for resources with elite universities.
10. Thus, in the UK, the government is pursuing a vigorous agenda of assessing and funding research according to its economic and social impact.
11. Abbott writes exclusively of the USA, where departmental structures are strongly reinforced within the academy. In that context, sociology can benefit from the defence of departmental autonomy by other disciplines. In the UK, departmental structures have been superseded in many universities and other aspects of the higher education environment, such as the RAE/REF, reinforce non-disciplinary subject areas. There were 61 submissions for Sociology in RAE 1996. This fell to 48 submissions in RAE 2001 and to 39 in RAE 2008. See Holmwood (2010).
12. Abbott (2001: 31) presents a visual representation of low and high fractal dimension in which sociology is associated with high fractal dimension, but he provides no disciplinary examplar of low fractal dimension
13. Abbott goes on to compare sociology internally to a 'caravansary on the Silk Road' beset by 'bandit gangs of positivists, feminist, interactionist and Marxists' who manage to rule occasionally and are paid tribute but 'when somebody more interesting comes along, they throw off the current overlords with little regret' (Abbott, 2001: 6). This hardly sounds like a discipline capable of exercising overlordship over subsidiary interdisciplinary subject areas that he otherwise presents in his discussion of the disciplinary system. In other words, he is describing sociology as a discipline in terms he will later reserve for interdisciplinarity.
14. Abbott also poses the question of whether such 'generalism will not wither in competition with other, specialist disciplines' (2001: 6), and offers the observation that 'generalism' might be a better strategy 'in an age of interdisciplinary study and university reorganization and shrinkage' (2001: 6). This contradicts his claim that it is precisely the disciplinary system that confers reproductive advantage. The possibility that, in a time of shrinkage, the consequences will not be even across disciplines, but that some may cede to interdisciplinary areas and others not, is not considered, while it is clear that interdisciplinary areas have less claim to distinctiveness in 'theory, method and substance' than even sociology.
15. Guggenheim and Novotny write:

    > The STS community would have set up a number of highly competent committees with flexible membership, including scientists and others from outside the STS orbit, in order to guarantee a broad range of expertise grounded, nonetheless, in an STS perspective . . . and [they] would possess the knowledge and communicative skills to gauge the anxieties of the public as much as its as-yet unarticulated desires. (2003: 250)

16. Latour's eschewal of critique is not unexpected, given his embrace of ethnography. It is a familiar feature of ethnographic approaches in anthropology that they embrace the point of view of their subjects. However, it does not seem to be the logical requirement that Latour seems to suppose and where it might be an attractive aspect of an approach to 'distant others', it is a curious feature where others are not 'distant', but among us. Thus, applied to the

capitalist firm, as it is by Thrift (2005), we are confronted by an overshoot, marking a transition from ‘critical management studies’ to ‘celebratory management studies’, where criticism gives way to celebration, where ‘for quite a few people, capitalism is not just hard graft. It is also fun. People get stuff from it – and not just more commodities. Capitalism has a kind of crazy vitality’ (2005: 2).

References

Abbott A (1988) *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Abbott A (2001) *Chaos of Disciplines*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Barzelay M (2000) *The New Public Management: Improving Research and Policy Dialogue*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Bell D (1960) *The End of Ideology: The Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*. New York: Free Press.

Bok D (2003) *Universities in the Marketplace: The Commercialization of Higher Education*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Boltanksi L and Chiapello E (2005 [1999]) *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. trans. G Elliott. London: Verso.

Burawoy M (2005) for Public Sociology. *American Sociological Review* 70(1): 2–28.

Caswill C and Wensley R (2007) Doors and boundaries: a recent history of the relationship between research and practice in UK organizational and management research. *Business History* 49: 293–320.

Collins R (2002) Review of Andrew Abbott Chaos of Disciplines. *Contemporary Sociology* 31(2): 230–3.

Dunleavy P and Hood C (1993) From old public administration to new public management. *Public Money and Management* 14(1): 9–16.

Etzkowitz H and Leydesdorff L (2000) The dynamics of innovation: from national systems and ‘mode 2’ to a triple helix of university-industry-government relations. *Research Policy* 29(2): 109–23.

Garfinkel H and Sacks H (1970) On the formal structures of practical action. In: McKinney J C and Tiryakian E A (eds) *Theoretical Sociology*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Gibbons M, Limosges C, Novotny H, Schwartzman S, Scott P and Trow M (1994) *The New Production of Knowledge*. London: Sage.

Gouldner A W (1970) *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*. London: Heinemann.

Gouldner A W (1973) Remembrance and renewal in sociology. In: *For Sociology: Renewal and Critique in Sociology Today*. New York: Basic Books.

Guggenheim M and Novotny H (2003) Joy in repetition makes the future disappear: a critical assessment of the present state of STS. In: Joerges B and Novotny H (eds) *Social Studies of Science and Technology: Looking Back Ahead*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Habermas J (1984 [1981]) *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. I: Reason and the Rationalisation of Society*. Trans. T McCarthy. London: Heinemann.

Hindess B (1977) *Philosophy and Methodology in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. Brighton: Harvester.

Hirshleifer J (1985) The expanding domain of economics. *American Economic Review* 75(6): 53–68.

Holmwood J (2007) Sociology as professional practice and public discourse: a critique of Michael Burawoy. *Sociological Theory* 25(1): 46–66.

Holmwood J (2010) Sociology's misfortune: disciplinarity, interdisciplinarity and the impact of audit culture. *British Journal of Sociology* 61(4):.

Horowitz I L (1994) *The Decomposition of Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Jasanoff S (2004) Ordering knowledge, ordering society. In: Jasanoff S (ed.) States of Knowledge: The Co-Production of Science and Social Order. London: Routledge.

Jessop B (1995) *The Regulation Approach: Governance and Post-Fordism, Economy and Society*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Lane J-E (2000) *New Public Management*. London: Routledge.

Latour B (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lazarsfeld P F and Rosenberg M (1955) General introduction. In: Lazarsfeld P F and Rosenberg M (eds) *The Language of Social Research*. New York: Free Press.

Lyotard J-F (1984 [1979]) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*.(trans Bennington G and Massumi B. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Marginson S and Considine M (2000) *The Enterprise University: Power, Governance, and Reinvention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Merton R K (1968 [1949]) On the history and systematics of sociological theory. In: *Social Theory and Social Structure*. New York: Free Press.

Mills C W (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Novotny H, Scott P and Gibbons M (2001) *Re-Thinking Science*. Cambridge: Polity.

Novotny H, Scott P and Gibbons M (2003) Introduction: 'Mode 2' revisited: the new production of knowledge. *Minerva* 41(3): 179–94.

Parsons T (1937) *The Structure of Social Action*. New York: Free Press.

Parsons T (1954 [1950]) The prospects of sociological theory. In: Parsons T (ed.) *Essays in Sociological Theory*, rev. edn. New York: Free Press.

Parsons T (1959) Some problems confronting sociology as a profession. *American Sociological Review* 24(4): 547–58.

Sacks H and Garfinkel H (1970) On formal structures of practical action. In: McKinney J C and Tiryakian E A (eds) *Theoretical Sociology*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, pp. 338–66.

Savage M (2009) Contemporary sociology and the challenge of descriptive assemblage. *European Journal of Social Theory* 12(1): 155–74.

Savage M and Burrows R (2007) The coming crisis of empirical sociology. *Sociology* 41(5): 885–97.

Slaughter S and Leslie L L (1997) *Academic Capitalism: Politics, Policies, and the Entrepreneurial University*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Slaughter S and Rhoades G (2004) *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press.

Stanley L (2005) A child of its time: hybridic perspectives on othering in sociology. *Sociological Research Online* 10(3). Available at: http://www.socresonline.org.uk/10/3/stanley.html.

Steinmetz G (2005) Scientific authority and the transition to post-Fordism: the plausibility of positivism in U.S. sociology since 1945. In: Steinmetz G (ed.) *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences: Positivism and its Epistemological Others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Stinchcombe A L (1994) Disintegrated disciplines and the future of sociology. *Sociological Forum* 9(2): 279–91.

Therborn G (1976) *Science, Class and Society*. London: Verso.

Thrift N (2005) *Knowing Capitalism*. London: Sage.

Turner S P and Turner J H (1990) *The Impossible Science: An Institutional Analysis of American Sociology*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Weber M (1994 [1904]) 'Objectivity' in social science and social policy. In: Weber M *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Trans. Shils Ea and Finch H A. New York: Free Press.

Willer D and Willer J (1973) *Systematic Empiricism: Critique of a Pseudo-Science*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Woolgar S (2004) What happened to provocation in science and technology studies? *History and Technology* 20(4): 339–49.

Woolgar S, Coopmans C and Neyland D (2009) Does STS mean business? *Organization*, 16(1): 5–30.

About the author

John Holmwood is Professor of Sociology at the University of Nottingham, UK. He is also Chair of the UK Council of Heads and Professors of Sociology. His main research interests are the relation between sociological theory and explanation, and social stratification and inequality. His current research addresses the challenge of global social inquiry and the role of pragmatism in the construction of public sociology. He has recently held a Leverhulme Research Fellowship on the moral economy of inequality. Address: School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD, UK [email: john.holmwood@nottingham.ac.uk]