

Sydney 4S 2018 panel session, Thursday 30 September

Lives in STS as ‘a series of failed political experiments’?

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Professionals’ lives as ongoing experiments, in a field of class

In 2007, Gary Werskey discussed two historical ‘radical science’ movements in Britain - in the 30s/40s and 70s/80s - and speculated on a possible third. We weave two ‘lives in STS’ in and around this historical framework.

mh view - born 40s @ England

lg view - born 80s @ China

1▶
30s-40s

‘Knew’ this previous generation as PhD researcher - became ashamed of them. Their radical politics became career, and elaboration of capital’s forces of production . . . the post-war orthodoxy of S&T policy R&D . . . a fetish of ‘innovation’ within Fordism & post-Fordism. Their historical materialism was scientism, politics succeeded massively, socialism failed naively.

Perspective of this generation is established in core graduate curriculum @ China - ‘Dialectics of Nature’ (DoN). First-movement scholars (Bernal, Needham) still discussed @ China, but “We don’t talk about their Left politics so much - it would diminish the objectivity of their scholarship.” DoN is close to the government.

2▶
70s-80s

Member of this ‘radical science’ generation - neo-Marxist *Radical Science Journal*. Evolved this into ‘cultural materialism’ (New Left, Marx ‘labour process’, science = cultural production). Real radicalism was historical awareness of class - ‘professional-managerial class’ (PMC). Illich critique of professionalist/Statist politics was crucial. Radicalism ‘in and against the PMC’ continued thro 90s - eg in participatory design of work infrastructures.

Surprised to discover this movement had influenced first generation in STS, imagined something similar to ‘radical science’ @ China today. First and second movements were rolled-up together in a Western package that arrived with ‘Great Enlightenment’ in 80s - the *movement* in the historical movement & Old/New Left differences not visible. “History may help me speak out my thoughts.”

3▶
Now

Was sceptical of Gary’s ‘third movement’. Then discovered the global movement for P2P-commons . . . ‘the 3rd movement’? Organic-intellectual rather than professionalised? Production of pluriversal knowledges rather than ‘science’? Cultural-materialist rather than Marxist? Environmentalist not productionist? *What kind of STS is needed, to facilitate this movement?* Post-post-Fordism? A radical *infrastructuring* movement?

In self protection (?) academics @ China have become more academic - driven to maximise publications regardless of quality or value? STS and DoN are contesting, in the sphere of ‘participatory research’. Scientism is our default mode? “We accept the products of the First movement, but I don’t think we have had a Second movement yet.” No idea what P2P-commons may look like in the biotech sphere in China.”

Thanks to Peter for convening this, and Gary for triggering the notion.

Lu (Lucy) Gao is an associate professor in the Institute for the History of Natural Sciences, Chinese Academy of Sciences. Mike Hales is an independent researcher-developer, *Barefoot Documents*. Gary Werskey’s article is at <<https://www.foprop.org/radical-science>> Video presentation is at <<https://youtu.be/9yD1sCz3aDU>>. Alternatively <<https://hooktube.com/9yD1sCz3aDU>> Related source materials and notes are alongside Gary’s article on the link above. These include a transcript of several hours’ interview around ‘the three movements’, background notes and presentation script.