ISSN 1755-9928 (Print)
ISSN 2753-3298 (Online)

Journal of
Scottish Thought

Research Articles

Scholastic ambivalence and Patrick Geddes: A sociology of failed sociology

Author: Alex Law

Volume 5, Issue 1
Pp: 41-71
2012
Published on: 1st Jan 2012

1495
ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Scholastic ambivalence and Patrick Geddes: A sociology of failed sociology

Alex Law

A literature of enchantment surrounds Patrick Geddes. Biographies and commentaries construct Geddes as a wayward genius, a unique personality at once inspirational and impossible, commanding devotion among his circle and incomprehension beyond it.[1] A disillusioned disciple like Lewis Mumford compared Geddes' unpublished papers to those left by Leonardo da Vinci, his knowledge of civics to Aristotle, his thought to Leibniz, and his sociology as an 'art of ideological cartography' analogous to pre-Columbian map-making.[2] Mumford speculated that Geddes might become more influential in the century ahead than Rousseau or Marx had been in earlier centuries because Geddes was 'a better sociologist'.[3] Philip Boardman also compared Geddes to 'a nineteenth century Leonardo' and that his generalism would soon (by 1954) be recognised as one of the great achievements of the nineteenth century.[4] Within academic sociology such claims echo recent assertions by Maggie Studholme that Geddes offers 'a brilliant anticipation' of current approaches to environmental sociology where Geddes compares positively to Durkheim and Marx.[5] Similarly, Chris Renwick and Richard Gunn assert that Geddes

[1] Particular thanks are due to Bridget Fowler for useful suggestions about Geddes' position-taking in social space, though I take responsibility for remaining weaknesses of the socio-analysis of Geddes.

[2] L. Mumford, 'Patrick Geddes, Victor Branford and applied sociology in England: The social survey, regionalism and urban planning', in H.E. Barnes (ed) *An Introduction to the History of Sociology* (Chicago, 1966); 'Patrick Geddes,' in D.L. Sills (ed) *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences,* Volumes 5–6 (New York, 1968); *Findings and Keepings: Analects for an Autobiography* (London, 1976): *My Works and Days: A Personal Chronicle* (New York, 1979); *Sketches From Life: The Autobiography of Lewis Mumford, The Early Years* (Boston, 1982); F.G. Novak (ed), *Lewis Mumford and Patrick Geddes: The Correspondence* (London, 1995).

[3] Mumford, 'Patrick Geddes, Victor Branford and applied sociology in England', 387.

[4] P. Boardman, *Patrick Geddes: Maker of the Future* (Chapel Hill, 1944), 136, 237.

[5] M. Studholme, 'Patrick Geddes and the history of environmental sociology in Britain: A cautionary tale', *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 8.3 (2008), 367–91, at 344; this, in the course of erroneously attributing to me a dismissal of Geddes on the basis of his evolutionism, his lack of knowledge of sociological contemporaries, and his utopian politics. See A. Law, 'The Ghost of Patrick Geddes: Civics as applied sociology',

developed 'a deeply sophisticated sociological theory', centred on a coherent ontology of the social comparable to the sociological classics.[6]

Yet even Mumford was forced to concede that, unlike the universal recognition of Aristotle and da Vinci's genius, Geddes' work, especially his sociology, lies mouldering in obscurity: 'Notwithstanding the fact that Patrick Geddes (1854–1932) and Victor Branford (1864–1930) devoted a good part of their lifetimes to the advancement of sociology, their contributions are scarcely known'.[7] John Scott recently noted the limited influence of Branford and Geddes even in their own lifetimes and that they are now largely forgotten relics in sociology.[8] In a survey of 255 professors of sociology in Britain in 2001 not one considered Geddes to be an influential 'model'.[9] Current sociologists enquire: 'Who reads Geddes now?' as Talcott Parsons once asked 'Who now reads Spencer?'[10] Despite a profusion of concepts and neologisms in Geddes' writings, not a single one survives in standard reference works in social theory or dictionaries of sociological terms.[11]

Sociological Research Online, 10.2 (2005).

[6] C. Renwick and R. Gunn, 'Demythologizing the machine: Patrick Geddes, Lewis Mumford, and classical sociological theory', *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 44 (2008), 59–76, at 64.

[7] Mumford, 'Patrick Geddes, Victor Branford and applied sociology in England', 370.

[8] J. Scott, 'The Edinburgh School of Sociology', *Journal of Scottish Thought*, 1:1 (2007), 89–102.

[9] A.H. Halsey. *A History Of Sociology in Britain: Science, Literature, and Society* (Oxford, 2004), ch. 4.

[10] T. Osborne, and N. Rose, 'Spatial phenomenotechnics: making space with Charles Booth and Patrick Geddes', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 22 (2004), 209–28 at 218.

[11] The main ones consulted include *The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology* (2000), *The Sage Dictionary of Sociology* (2006), *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (2009), and *Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* (2006). Geddes' ideas are more likely to be a matter of record in standard reference works in town planning, geography and urban studies, for instance, as the inventor of 'conurbation' and 'world city' in R.J Johnston, D. Gregory, G. Pratt, and M. Watts (eds), *Dictionary of Human Geography* (Oxford, 2000). See also my entry on Geddes in the *Encyclopaedia of Urban Studies* (Los Angeles, 2010). Geddes surfaces as a more foundational figure for Indian sociology, appearing as the inventor of the term 'conurbation' – see B. Bushan (ed.), *Anmol's Dictionary of Sociology* (New Dehli, 1989) – or as the founder of Indian sociology (see S.D. Pillaiwers (ed.), *Indian Sociology Through Ghurye: A Dictionary* (Mumbai, 1997), and in trend reports on Indian sociology, such as R. Mukherjee (ed.), 'Trends in Indian Sociology', *Current Sociology,* 25:3 (1977), 1–147, journal of the International Sociological Association. Even here, though, Geddes' legacy is mixed. He left the Department of Sociology at Bombay in 1923 in such a disorganised state that the authorities actively considered its closure until the appointment of Ghurye to the Chair vacated by Geddes. Ghurye transformed the reputation of India's first sociology department.

In the standard historiography of sociology in Britain, Geddes is presented typically as an eccentric, amateurish episode.[12] His success in leading a convinced circle of acolytes could not be translated into the foundation of a distinctive 'school' of sociology. As one critic of the 'failure' of the entire sociological enterprise put it, the Geddesian conception of civic sociology 'died with its proponents', having become something of an 'embarrassment' to their successors.[13] Even in the one area of sociology where Geddes found recognition, urban sociology, his contribution has been judged as 'negative'.[14] Geddes' survey method lacked methodological rigour and his social theory was 'instinctive rather than systematic', which, as Ruth Glass argued in the mid-1950s, discredited urban sociology for a generation: 'As their influence declined during the late twenties, sociology and town planning parted company. In sociology, Patrick Geddes, Victor Branford and their partners from the planning field like Raymond Unwin left hardly any traces'.[15] Helen Meller notes that Geddes was 'too impatient to spend his time developing his ideas in a major treatise', as Marx did with *Capital* or Weber attempted in *Economy and Society*. Ultimately, Geddes produced only one sole authored monograph, *Cities in Evolution*, despite being highly productive, albeit of work often judged to be of 'very inferior quality'.[16] Unwritten and unformed works of scholarship remained largely unwritten and unformed.[17]

For some the relegation of Geddes represents a lucky break for British sociology. Fuller identifies Geddes and Branford as the 'major British contributors' to the unwelcome extension of Darwinian theory into the human realm.[18] After Nazi genocide disgraced eugenics as a scientific movement, Fuller argues, sociological amnesia allowed Geddes and Branford to escape a similar notoriety, despite their shared interest with fascism in regional movements, naturalism, and bio-diversity (notwithstanding the reality of the technocratic, centralised Nazi state). Fuller further argues that the Nazi policy of exterminism was an aberration peculiar to Hitler's state of mind, without which the logic of Nazi ideology 'could have retained Branford and Geddes'

---

[12] P. Abrams, *The Origins of British Sociology, 1834–1914* (Chicago, 1968); M. Bulmer (ed.), *Essays on the History of British Sociological Research* (Cambridge, 1985).

[13] G. Hawthorn, *Enlightenment and Despair: A History of Sociology* (Cambridge, 1976), 167.

[14] Abrams, *The Origins of British Sociology, 1834–1914*, 120.

[15] R. Glass, *Clichés of Urban Doom and Other Essays* (Oxford, 1989), 39.

[16] H. Meller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (London, 1990), 2.

[17] Mumford, *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Volumes 5–6, 331.

[18] S. Fuller, *Science Vs. Religion? Intelligent Design and the Problem of Evolution* (Cambridge, 2007).

interest, if not outright endorsement'. Without Hitler, Fuller would have us believe, Geddes and Branford's regressive bio-modernism could have secured a more firm standing within sociology.[19]

Against speculative counter-factuals, I offer an alternative, sociological explanation for Geddes' failed sociology. There are specifically sociological reasons for Geddes' failure to be recognised by sociological successors despite enjoying initial advantages as a major force in early British sociology. By the turn of the twentieth century his approach was already known to sociologists in the US and was still an occasional point of reference for US sociology in the 1940s.[20] He was supported by influential figures like Branford and Mumford, an illustrious Geddessian author on matters of culture, technics and the city.[21] Geddes, Branford and their version of the Le Play tradition dominated the sole sociology journal, *Sociological Review*, until the early 1930s, a journal in which Geddes scores rather highly in a citation metric, albeit from a small sample.[22]

One part of an explanation for the eclipse of Geddes as a sociologist lies in his institutional failure, the failure, specifically, to be appointed to the first Chair of Sociology at the LSE for reasons that remain unclear. All of the paraphernalia of academic recognition denied to Geddes affected the perception of competitors and emulators in the emerging field of sociology. Sociology would have been an entirely different animal had Geddes' brand of evolutionary sociology triumphed over the social philosophy of the victor, L.T. Hobhouse. Halsey speculates that Hobhouse may have been preferred instead of Geddes for cultural rather than strictly intellectual reasons: 'Geddes was an outspoken Scot, sarcastic in the face of established authority, formally without relevant educational qualifications, and given to loquacious impromptu outbursts when criticized'.[23] Hobhouse's successor, Morris Ginsberg, with a strong interest in marginalising direct competitors in evolutionary sociology, simply refused to mention Geddes by name in lectures or publications.

---

[19] Fuller, *Science Vs. Religion? Intelligent Design and the Problem of Evolution* ,152; see also M. Studholme, J. Scott, and C.T. Husbands, 'Doppelgängers and Racists: On Inhabiting Alternative Universes. A Reply to Steve Fuller's "A Path Better Not to Have Been Taken"', *Sociological Review*, 55: 4 (2007), 816–22, and C. Renwick, 'Patrick Geddes and the politics of evolution', *Endeavour*, 34:4 (2010), 151–6.

[20] H.W. Odum, 'Patrick Geddes' Heritage to "The Making of the Future"', *Social Forces*, 22:3 (1944), 275–81; C. Zueblin, 'The world's first sociological laboratory', *American Journal of Sociology*, 4 (1899), 577–92.

[21] See Renwick and Gunn, 'Demythologizing the machine'.

[22] Halsey, *A History Of Sociology in Britain: Science, Literature, and Society*, 174.

[23] Ibid., 50.

Geddes' failure is commonly understood as part of the general weakness of early British sociology to become more than a footnote to developments elsewhere in Europe and the United States.[24] Geddes can be considered a 'failure', however, only if his project is understood primarily as that of a social theorist. Osborne and Rose suggest that Geddes was more of 'a mediator', an intellectual who attempted to move wider circles into civic action in an ethical, rather than an epistemological, relationship to urban space.[25] As an ethical and practical example, Geddes continues to inspire civic activists and dissenters like the late Colin Ward, who underwent his own Geddesian anti-scholastic re-education.[26] Nonetheless, recasting Geddes as an ethical mediator doesn't address the specifically sociological nature of the discipline's own forgotten origins.

That Geddes failed to bequeath an intellectual legacy to sociology as opposed to an ethical example can be understood sociologically in terms of an ambivalent disposition towards academic production and scholastic institutions. A sociology of sociology is often confined to internal problems of theory, method and analysis.[27] Like other disciplines, sociology has 'its own traditions and national particularities, its obligatory problematics, its habits of thought, its shared beliefs and self-evidences, its rituals and consecrations, its constraints as regards publication of findings, its specific set of presuppositions inscribed in the collective history of the speciality (the academic unconscious)'.[28] Success or failure cannot be measured solely in epistemological terms of internal logic since there are few shared criteria to measure scientific value. Indeed, the lack of explicit criteria for classifying sociology into a finished hierarchy of scientific value allows marginalised 'names' like Geddes to be periodically resurrected.

---

[24] R.C Bannister, 'Sociology', in T.M. Porter and D. Ross (eds) *The Cambridge History of Science: The Modern Social Sciences* (Cambridge, 2003); H. Becker and H.E Barnes, *Social Thought From Lore to Science, Volume III: Sociological Trends Throughout the World* (Gloucester, Mass., 1938); E.M. Burns, 'Great Britain', in E.R.A Seligman (ed), *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, Volumes 1–2* (New York, 1930; J. Rumney, 'British Sociology', in G. Gurvitch and W.E. Moore (eds), *Twentieth Century Sociology* (New York, 1945).

[25] Osborne and Rose, 'Spatial phenomenotechnics'.

[26] C. Ward, *Influences: Voices of Creative Dissent* (Bideford, 1991); though again, Ward notes the limits to Geddes' anti-scholasticism: 'He was the kind of prophet who leaves behind disciples like Mumford, but no coherent body of theory'.

[27] R. N. Soffer, 'Why do disciplines fail? The strange case of British Sociology', *The English Historical Review*, 97:385 (1982), 767–802; L. Goldman, 'Foundations of British sociology 1880–1930: Contexts and biographies', *Sociological Review*, 55 (2007), 431–40.

[28] P. Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity* (Cambridge, 2004), 94.

Geddes and his circle form part of the objective presuppositions of contemporary sociology despite or perhaps because of the historical amnesia of the discipline. A sociological unconscious operates to consign Geddes (and other precursors) to the condescension of posterity, repressing the historical preconditions of the hard-won methods, theories and concepts of contemporary sociology. Certainly, there have been intermittent strategies of scholarly rehabilitation of Geddes and his circle. More common, though, has been the forgetfulness of sociology's own faltering history. A story is told of the classical canon of social theory, of a few select individuals who made permanent contributions to a cumulative process of sociological knowledge.

Any attempt to construct a sociology of the sociologist, even one as seemingly atypical as Geddes, must also refuse the standpoint of the isolated individual as the subjective author of their own social world. While Geddes constructed a distinctive form of sociological inquiry, socio-analysis has to account for the operation of a 'double hermeneutic' whereby 'the constructors are themselves socially constructed and their construction depends on their position in the objective social space that science has to construct'.[29] A socio-analysis of Geddes' disciplinary failure has to attend to the social conditions of possibility and constraint operating at three levels: overall social space, scientific field, and scholastic universe.[30] This paper plots the social origin and social trajectory of Geddes, his position-taking within overall social space and within sociology as a dominated discipline within the scientific field. Geddes cuts a profoundly ambivalent figure. To the extent that he coveted academic recognition Geddes made contact with a scholastic universe which pulled in the opposite direction from the ethical and political interests that Geddes and his circle invested in the stakes of non-academic games.

Elimination from the sociology canon

Geddes' institutional defeat and intellectual failure represents a path not taken by professional sociology. This was consolidated by the growing post-war influence of a select group of social theorists who were erected into a foundational canon of 'classical sociology'.[31] A literary or scientific canon

[29] Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity,* 93.

[30] P. Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Cambridge, 2000).

[31] P.R. Baehr, *Founders, Classics, Canons: Modern Disputes Over the Origins and Appraisal of*

refers to a privileged set of texts and authors embedded in a continual process of exegetical demarcation and retrospective interpretation tied to struggles over the distribution of symbolic and cultural capital in relatively autonomous fields.[32] Well into the twentieth century, an orthodox canon for professional sociology had still not been established. In Europe and North America, induction into sociology tended to be encyclopaedic rather than canonical, characterised by the wide-ranging classification of a loosely-defined field, populated by a large cast of characters, arranged by schools, nationality and date.[33] In Britain, the development of sociology was especially laggard, resisted by the traditional centres of higher learning until the post-war expansion of higher education.[34]

By the 1960s, the sociological canon began to sediment into an authoritative tradition through a gradual and uneven elimination process. A pedagogy of classical texts instructed scholars and students in the legitimate 'names' and, more importantly, potentially productive intellectual puzzles appropriate to academic sociology.[35] From a strong institutional base in the United States, subsequently exported worldwide, a recognizable canon emerged through mutually reinforcing processes including the translation into English of key works, the publication of textbooks and edited collections, institutional autonomy, and a changing social and political context, from Cold War consensus in the 1950s to the demands that radicalised students made on sociology teaching and course design in the 1960s.[36] Critically, the canon was neither externally imposed nor intellectually arbitrary but met certain criteria of quality.[37] Conceptually sophisticated and analytically powerful social theories opened-up imaginative and original pathways for further substantive studies and theoretical disputation.

Sociology's Heritage (New Brunswick, 2002); N. Mouzelis, 'In defence of the sociological canon: A reply to David Parker', *Sociological Review*, 45:2 (1997), 244–53; A.R. How, 'The author, the text and the canon: Gadamer and the persistence of classic texts in sociology', *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 7:1 (2007), 5–22; M. Parker, 'Why bother with Durkheim? Teaching sociology in the 1990s', *Sociological Review*, 45:1 (1997), 122–46.

[32] P. Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*; J. Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago, 1993).

[33] R.W. Connell, 'Why is classical theory classical?', *American Journal of Sociology*, 102:6 (1997), 1511–57.

[34] Halsey, *A History Of Sociology in Britain*.

[35] R. Boudon, 'Will sociology ever be a normal science?', *Theory and Society*, 17:5 (1988), 747–71.

[36] Baehr, *Founders, Classics, Canons*.

[37] Mouzelis, 'In defence of the sociological canon'.

In this restricted sense, the sociological canon is symbolic of an autonomous field. In the 1930s, Lewis Mumford explained Geddes' failure to enter the emerging canon in terms of criteria internal to social theory: his originality, the closed form of presentation, and unfamiliar use of diagrams and graphic notation: 'he practiced synthesis in an age of specialism and stood for the insurgence of life in a world that submitted ever more fully to the gods of mechanical routine'.[38] Similarly in the 1950s, Heinz Maus' *A Short History of Sociology*, an attempt to reconnect German sociology to the pre-war history of the discipline, identified the importance of Geddes for making the urban environment a discrete sociological concern. However, Maus added, Geddes 'opposed the course of development taken by sociology in the twentieth century' by constructing 'an all-embracing world picture in which mathematics and natural science served as the basis for sociology'. [39]

Among encyclopaedically-inclined competitors Geddes' contribution to sociology was typically ignored. Passing reference was occasionally made to his biological studies of evolution and sex in introductory sociology texts of the 1920s[40] or urban reforms[41] rather than Geddes' positive sociology. The 1914–18 war, not Nazi genocide, destroyed the facile optimism of positivism and social evolutionary perspectives in academic sociology. More systematic, specialised and technical forms of sociology began to supplant encyclopaedic enthusiasms. In this context, it would prove impossible for Geddes to win a space for his eclectic blend of nineteenth century sociology, despite the propagandising efforts of Branford and Mumford.

As sociology expanded in the 1960s, Geddes fared little better in orthodox accounts of the sociological canon. He is largely absent from the burgeoning market for introductory and reference sociology texts titles that have appeared since the 1960s. Among the popular sociology titles of the period, Geddes fails to appear in popular collections of orthodoxy such as *The Founding Fathers of Social Science*, or student introductions like Alan Swingewood's *A Short History*

[38] L. Mumford, 'Introduction', Boardman, *Patrick Geddes*, viii. Although public engagement did not exempt Weber (through the highest levels of German statecraft), Durkheim (through public intervention in the Dreyfus affair) or, eventually, Marx (the exiled revolutionary) from the canon.

[39] H. Maus, *A Short History of Sociology* (London, 1962), 48.

[40] See inter alia, T.N. Carver, *Sociology and Social Progress: A Handbook for Students of Sociology* (Boston, 1905), 618; C.M. Case (ed.), *Outlines of Introductory Sociology: A Textbook of Readings in Social Science* (New York, 1924), 515; R.E. Park and E.W. Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Chicago, 1921), 153; J. J. Findlay, *An Introduction to Sociology for Social Workers and General Readers* (Manchester, 1920), 194.

[41] R.M. MacIver, *Society: A Textbook of Sociology* (London 1937), 288.

of Sociological Thought which has appeared in a number of revised editions for almost forty years.[42]

General neglect by the pedagogical and scholarly core of sociology has nevertheless been punctuated every few decades by a series of specialised studies and biographies of Geddes, from Defries in 1927 to more recent scholarship like Welter and Hysler-Rubin.[43] Of the published monographs, Philip Mairet's makes explicit reference to Geddes as a sociologist in the title *Pioneer of Sociology* (1957). Helen Meller's sub-title, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (1990), hints at the sociology context, although its main emphasis is suggested by the book series in which it appears: 'Geography, Environment and Planning', rather than sociology as such. While Mairet paints Geddes as a 'pioneer', Meller describes Geddes as 'a maverick social scientist'. Other titles emphasise town planning,[44] amongst an encyclopaedic range of competing denominators: biologist, environmentalist, educationalist, and peacemaker.

All his biographers recount Geddes' initial encounter with the sociology of Comte, Spencer, and Le Play, his engagement with social statistics, his work for the Sociological Society and articles for *Sociological Papers* and *Sociological Review*, his sociologically-informed city surveys, his sociological exhibitions, and his appointment as Professor of Sociology and Civics at Bombay. From this diverse and complex assemblage it becomes difficult to codify a conceptual framework or set of methodological rules that might allow Geddes' encyclopaedic approach to be translated into the orthodox canon of academic sociology.[45] Geddes' own messianic apologia, appearing as a pioneer or prophet 'who rings the bell and runs away', left it to others to provide coherence and substance to his sociological system.[46] Of course, this is exactly

[42] T. Raison (ed.), *The Founding Fathers of Social Science* (Harmondsworth, 1969); A. Swingewood, *A Short History of Sociological Thought* (London, 2000; third edition).

[43] V.M. Welter, *Biopolis: Patrick Geddes and the City of Life* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002); N. Hysler-Rubin, *Patrick Geddes and Town Planning: A Critical View* (London, 2011). John Scott and Ray Bromley's study of early British sociology, *Visions of Reconstruction: Sociology and Social Renewal, 1880–1930* promises to re-centre the Geddes circle within the history of early British sociology.

[44] Boardman, *Patrick Geddes: Maker of the Future* (1944, 1978); Kitchen, *A Most Unsettling Person: The Life and Ideas of Patrick Geddes, Founding Father of City Planning and Environmentalism* (1975); Stalley (ed.), *Patrick Geddes: Spokesman for Man and the Environment* (1972).

[45] Geography appears to have had less difficulty as a discipline assimilating, codifying and revising Geddes' regional principles. See D.N. Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (Oxford, 1992), 271–290.

[46] See Kitchen, *A Most Unsettling Person*, 234.

what Branford and Mumford attempted in their different ways, albeit with scarce pedagogical success against the emerging orthodoxy.

Geddes was not entirely ignored in orthodox sociology. Here, though, the treatment could be far from favourable. In Howard Becker and Harry Elmer Barnes' epic 1930s history of sociology, *Social Thought From Lore to Science*, published just a few years after the death of Geddes, Geddes is held personally responsible for the sorry state of academic sociology in pre-war Britain. Provincial British sociology was characterised as mired in 'discipleship' and indentured to 'dilettantish' forms of positivism, and only beginning to emerge from a self-imposed exile from international developments in the field. Becker described Geddes as a 'Scottish naturalist and mystic', devoted to intellectual generalism and practical reform mobilised under a personality cult.[47] Such messianism inhibited the collegiate development of academic sociology. 'Here certainly was a Diogenes Teufelsdrockh in the flesh, an unrivalled example of the Professor of Things in General. The flaming energy of Geddes seems, to the academic sociologist at least, to have been tragically wasted through incessant changes in direction … the very genius of Geddes provided still another reason for the persistent neglect of sociology by British universities'.[48]

Barnes proved more charitable. In the early 1930s he commissioned Mumford to write an essay on Geddes and Branford for *An Introduction to the History of Sociology*. This was partly in response to Mumford's championing of Geddes and Branford in his published work in the US. Mumford brought the chapter to Geddes' attention in 1930 and 1931[49] as an opportunity to place his distinctive sociology within mainstream currents, and enquired about Geddes' contact with Durkheim, Reclus and others. In the resulting chapter, entitled 'Patrick Geddes, Victor Branford and applied sociology in England [sic]: The

[47] Becker and Barnes, *Social Thought From Lore to Science, Volume III: Sociological Trends Throughout the World*, 811. Howard P. Becker (1889–1960), the sociologist of folklore, is not to be confused with Howard S. Becker (born 1928), the sociologist of deviance, art and methodology.

[48] Becker and Barnes, *Social Thought From Lore to Science, Volume III: Sociological Trends Throughout the World* , 812: It was Geddes' philosophy of generalism that Mumford most valued rather than the specific terms of his monstrous Comte-Le Play system: 'P.G.'s philosophy helped saved me from becoming a monocular specialist: but even better, after I had achieved competence in more than one field, it gave me the confidence to become a generalist – one who sought to bring together in an intelligible pattern the knowledge that the specialist had, by over-strenuous concentration, sealed off in compartments'. Mumford, *Findings and Keepings: Analects for an Autobiography*, 101.

[49] See *Lewis Mumford and Patrick Geddes: The Correspondence*, 305, 326.

social survey, regionalism and urban planning', Mumford concisely elucidates the unwieldy Geddesian system in an attempt to rescue its rational kernel from the shell of nineteenth century positivism.[50] After it appeared in 1948 the book passed through several editions. In the mid-sixties, Barnes included the essay on Geddes and Branford in a new abridged, mass market edition as representing 'major figures in sociology and the basic issues in sociological theory of continuing importance and relevance'.[51]

Appearing at the cusp of a new wave of expansion of the field of academic sociology, Geddes might have, but did not, become an attractive figure to a new generation of sociology students. Barnes's inclusion of Geddes and Branford as figures of continuing relevance was not entirely anachronistic even in the 1960s. In his monumental history of social theory, *The Making of Sociology*, published in 1971, Ronald Fletcher presents a more explicit case for excluding Geddes and Branford from the sociological canon and fully recognises that Geddes and Branford were prime movers of foundational sociology in Britain.[52] Geddesian sociography is not inherently inferior to sociological theory since, Fletcher argues, the gap between social theory and sociography is largely illusory. Unlike 'fact-finders' of the stamp of Booth and Rowntree, Geddes was at least committed to an overarching social theory, a creative synthesis of Le Play's model of folk, place and work and Comte's theory of civics. However, Geddes and Branford failed to generate an *original* social theory that would productively guide the further development of theory, research and analysis, leading Fletcher to relegate them to an appendix on 'the Sociographers', alongside the first Chicago School of Sociology, as an applied branch of sociology.

While Geddes and Branford applied and synthesised the social theories and methods of others, they did not make a distinctive contribution to the cumulative development of social theory, its nature, scope, or methods. Geddes thought that his city surveys and exhibitions would fulfil the promise of nineteenth century sociology contained in outline in Darwin, Comte and Le Play, functioning as 'the needed exposition of these main teachers, the delivery

---

[50] Mumford, *Sketches From Life: The Autobiography of Lewis Mumford*, *The Early Years*, 329, recorded his growing impatience with an ageing Geddes' mania for monological discourse: 'I kept asking for the living kernel of his wisdom, and he insisted that I should swallow a heap of husks. Though I tried hard for a while to treat the latter as food, I could not deceive myself. He himself had taught me the difference'.

[51] H.E. Barnes, (ed.) *An Introduction to the History of Sociology*, (Chicago, 1966), vii.

[52] R. Fletcher,*The Making of Sociology: A Study of Sociological Theory, Volume 2: Developments* (London, 1971), 832.

of their message, the justification of their great previsions'.[53] If academic sociology is defined above all by theoretical originality rather than practical usefulness or descriptive accuracy, then Geddes and Branford's contribution is that of the creative but secondary application of the theories and methods of more fundamental contributions of others. Geddes gambled that rewards of recognition and legitimacy would be attracted by his synthetic Comte-Le Play system, though perhaps not immediately, and sought sociological distinction by assimilating, synthesising and transcending recognised precursors. Geddes lost his wager.

Geddes and scholasticism

As is well known, sociology faced an uphill struggle to win institutional recognition in Britain. Edwardian sociology was a dispersed discipline, with no coherent epistemological centre and attracted participants from varied academic and non-academic origins.[54] There was no institutional base from which to impose methodological orthodoxy and unify the field through rational dialogue around a common epistemological frame. With its connotations of critique and whiff of socialism, sociology was for long time a dominated subject in British institutional life.[55] Institutional recognition for sociology lagged behind developments in France, Germany and the United States, where it had begun to get a toehold in universities. In Britain, sociology emerged only gradually as an academic discipline from under the tutelage of entrenched disciplines and conservative institutional structures.[56]

Since it takes as its object the social world, whose stakes are already contested by social interests, the legitimacy of scientific autonomy readily granted to other sciences is more severely circumscribed for sociology. As Pierre Bourdieu has argued, 'Sociology is socially weak, and all the weaker, no doubt, the more scientific it is'.[57] As a dominated, weakly formed discipline, early sociology in Britain failed to develop the incisive social criticism that it

[53] Kitchen, *A Most Unsettling Person*, 236.

[54] See Abrams, *The Origins of British Sociology, 1834–1914*, and Halsey, *A History Of Sociology in Britain: Science, Literature, and Society*.

[55] See R.N. Soffer, 'Why do disciplines fail? The strange case of British Sociology', *The English Historical Review,* 97:385 (1982), 767–802.

[56] As E.M Burns argued in the entry on 'Great Britain', in E.R.A Seligman (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, Volumes 1–2* (New York, 1930).

[57] Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity,* 88.

provided elsewhere as an autonomous professional discipline and bracketed out the social and material preconditions for intellectual production.[58] Biology, specifically evolutionary theory, gave British sociology a broad, shared frame of reference. From its position of weak autonomy from external interests, sociology borrowed legitimacy from the hierarchical authority of the natural sciences. Geddes met a demand for a scientific brand of evolutionary sociology in an intellectual climate largely shaped by Comte and Spencer and the pre-eminence of natural science as a model of methodology.[59]

Geddes refused to be confined by disciplinary boundaries, even one as porous as sociology, and opted for a strategy of moral appeal through generalised laws of social evolution, illustrated by practical example. Sociology appeared to him as a middle term between geography and biology. Evolutionism was common intellectual currency not only in Britain but also for Emile Durkheim in France and Georg Simmel in Germany. Yet Geddes failed to engage with the path being blazed by Durkheim in France, even then not an obscure figure but leader of an increasingly famous school of sociology, and with whom Geddes had some personal acquaintance when their paths crossed in 1900 at the International Conference on the Social Sciences in Paris. Geddes would also have been aware of the paper that Durkheim had read to a meeting of the Sociological Society in 1904 alongside one by Geddes' closest collaborator, Victor Branford, on the relationship of sociology to philosophy and other social sciences.[60] In his contribution, Durkheim was sharply critical of sociologists, perhaps with Geddes in mind, that continued the positivist tradition of Comte and Spencer of speculative general laws of social evolution rather than disciplinary specialisation through systematic theorisation founded on a comparative methodology. Durkheim's intervention excited considerable international debate, much of it defensive of Comtean philosophy, leading the Sociological Society to publish a letter and a major programmatic essay from Durkheim clarifying the need to separate sociology from philosophy as a necessary first step of scientific specialisation.[61]

---

[58] Soffer, 'Why do disciplines fail?', 767.

[59] For instance, Mumford denied that he learned anything from Geddes' graphs and categories and that only his generalism and biology made a lasting contribution to his intellectual development. *Sketches From Life*, 330.

[60] E. Durkheim, 'On the relation of sociology to the social sciences and to philosophy', *Sociological Papers* (London, 1905), 195–200. Durkheim appeared in the first volume of *Sociological Papers*, which listed among the council members of the Sociological Society, 'Professor Geddes, President, Edinburgh School of Sociology'.

[61] E. Durkheim and E. Fauconnet, 'Sociology and the social sciences', *Sociological Papers*

Ignoring Durkheim's prognosis, Geddes and his circle continued to pursue a generalised scientific effect that would reduce the distance between biology and sociology. With his background in natural science, close to the apex of the scientific hierarchy in Edwardian Britain, and despite a lack of formal qualifications, Geddes possessed sufficient scientific capital to force an entry into the loosely-defined sociological field. Sociologists like Dahrendorf and Fuller argue that the division between eugenics and evolution was not as great as some historians of British sociology like Halliday and Abrams claim.[62] However, Geddes and Branford objected to a conception of sociology as an uncritical fusion of eugenics and evolution.[63] Their naturalistic claims about socio-biological diversity depended on a mutualist vision of the regional division of labour against the standardisation imposed by state social policy. Where eugenicists individualised biological fitness as pre-social, Geddes socialised biological improvement as something inherent to collective life and, like Darwin, assumed that social altruism was compatible with, and even essential to, species-survival. He regarded unproductive financiers and speculators as parasitically corrupting the socio-genetic stock in contrast to the role of an activist sociology in advancing the general cultural stock as well as reforming the material stock.[64]

Geddes conceived sociology as a loose discipline that overlaps with related disciplines, principally geography, culture, history and, most centrally, biology, but does not dominate or exclude them.[65] Later attempts to create a sociological

(London, 1905), 258–280.

[62] R. Dahrendorf, *LSE: A History of the London School of Economics and Political Science, 1895–1995* (Oxford, 1995); S. Fuller, *Science Vs. Religion? Intelligent Design and the Problem of Evolution* (Cambridge, 2007); R. J. Halliday, 'The sociological movement, the Sociological Society and the genesis of academic sociology in Britain', *Sociological Review*, 16 (1968): 377–98; P. Abrams, *The Origins of British Sociology, 1834–1914* (Chicago, 1968).

[63] M. Studholme, J. Scott, and C. T. Husbands, 'Doppelgängers and Racists: On Inhabiting Alternative Universes. A Reply to Steve Fuller's "A Path Better Not to Have Been Taken"', *Sociological Review*, 55: 4 (2007), 816–22.

[64] P. Geddes, 'Civics: As applied sociology', *Sociological Papers* (London, 1905), 101–18.

[65] In this, Geddes does not, in my view, share an epistemology in common with the major classical social theorists like Durkheim, Weber, Simmel and Tonnies as has been asserted recently by some sociologists. Renwick and Gunn, in their essay 'Demythologizing the machine: Patrick Geddes, Lewis Mumford, and classical sociological theory', 75, think otherwise: 'An examination of Geddes's rarely studied writings shows that he possessed a theoretical framework that was explicitly thought-out in terms of sociology as an independent and autonomous science. Indeed, in many of his conclusions about the nature and maintenance of social order, he was in total agreement with Durkheim, Weber, and classical sociology in general'. This is a

canon further locked-in the discipline as a closed enterprise precisely because scientific status is highest where the acquisition of objective knowledge as the privileged price of entry to the field must be able to demonstrate not only that it is intellectually demanding but also that it is esoteric and exclusionary. Observing the logic of scientific vision and division, Durkheim's social facts, Weber's social action and Simmel's social forms strategically demarcated sociology as a closed system, purged of extraneous material like biology, psychology, geography or metaphysics.[66] Each attempted to limit the effect of heteronomous social power on the internal production of sociological knowledge by developing methodical and rigorous techniques of conceptual objectification. The canon demanded that sociology become an autonomous zone of academic production as a precondition of occupying a higher position in the hierarchy of the scientific field and the university system.

While scientific disciplines do not function as completely finished systems, recognition is established within scholastic circles that operate as if they could be closed to external pressures. Academics willingly submit to dialogue, dispute, demonstration and refutation through formal procedures and classifications. A scholastic disposition depends on 'studious leisure'[67] obtained at a certain distance from utilitarian necessity. In order to think social theory it is necessary to retire from the serious games of the social world and become preoccupied with the gratuitous games of scholarship. Scholastic separation and withdrawal from the world has ambiguous effects. It can appear as both liberatory and limiting, autonomous but disconnected. It generates its own scientific profits and illusions. Not the least of these is the scholastic conflation of 'things of logic' with the 'logic of things', forcing ordinary practices to conform to theoretical representations and a self-conscious scientific will.[68]

Until his system began to ossify in later years, Geddes did not simply impose prior intellectual constructions on his subjects in the scholastic manner. He rejected what he saw as the futile games of *homo scholasticus* and wanted to overcome any rigid separation between life and theory under his motto 'learn by living'. He sought to raise spiritual values, self-understanding and wonderment through active environmental improvement and mutual cooperation, not by academic withdrawal.

debatable claim, requiring more detailed consideration than is possible here.

[66] E. Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (London, 1982; original 1895); M. Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley, 1978; original 1922); G Simmel, *Sociology: Inquiries Into the Construction of Social Forms* (Leiden, 2009; original 1908).

[67] Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*.

[68] P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge, 1990), 49.

> It is the observant naturalist, the travelled zoologist and botanist, who later becomes the productive writer on evolution. It is the historian who may best venture on into the philosophy of history; – to think the reverse is to remain in the pre-scientific order altogether: hence the construction of systems of abstract and deductive economics, politics or morals, has really been the last surviving effort of scholasticism.[69]

Geddes' vision for sociology was far from an autonomous logic of discovery. His practical reason, his feel for the game, left him remarkably attentive to other cultural practices and products, as his work in Cyprus, Jerusalem and, above all, India, testify.

Abrupt rejection of scholasticism does not automatically result in more reflexive socio-analysis. Indeed, Geddes falls into the scholastic trap where he mistakes his elaborate theoretical constructs for the effective causes of myriad cultural, economic and social practices, as when he wilfully read back into the historical record mythical precursors as simpler versions of modern social forms.[70] Like other early sociologists, Geddes felt the force of the pre-scientific social world as well as the burden of scientific schematicism. Intellectual flexibility and cultural generosity in practice resulted in the eclectic confusion of Geddes' theoretical constructions and concept formation. His obsessive production of new concepts certainly represented a scholastic break with ordinary usage. However, Geddes' elaborate conceptual systems traversed the frontier between practical reason and scholastic logic without satisfying the demands of either.

A refractory habitus

Geddes' sociological failure depended both on the dispositions that he derived from the habitus of social origin and the positions that the structure of the scientific field tolerated or encouraged at any particular point. As Bourdieu states of the social trajectory of artists:

> Positive or negative sanctions, success or failure, encouragement or warnings, consecration or exclusion, all indicating to each writer (etc.) – and the ensemble of his rivals – the objective truth of the position he

[69] Geddes, 'Civics: As applied sociology', *Sociological Papers*, 83.

[70] Ibid.

> occupies and his probable future, are effectively one set of the major mediations through which the incessant redefinition of the 'creative project' is shaped, with failure encouraging reconversion or retreat from the field, and consecration reinforcing and liberating initial ambitions.[71]

Geddes gave a brief sketch of his own formation and lifelong attitude to education in the mid-1920s.[72] A semi-rural childhood under the nurturing guidance of his religious soldier father – 'the wise father did not hurry me towards work or college' – equipped Geddes with boundless self-confidence as well as a deep knowledge and practical feel for nature. From humble beginnings Geddes' father rose to become Sergeant Major in the Black Watch regiment of the British Army, limited from further promotion only by the lack of an independent income.[73] He recalled his childhood freedom to explore nature as an open-ended activity of 'vital self-education' acquired through 'first-hand contact with places and things, work and experiment; and secondly, yet only secondly, from books'.[74] Sent to Perth Academy at the slightly late age of eight, Geddes mixed mainly with children from middle class backgrounds and had little contact with urban working class Scots in his youth. As reported by the Royal Commission on Schools in 1868, when Geddes was still at school, Perth Academy was attended mostly by middle class sons and daughters of retail traders, shopkeepers and farmers (see Table 1).[75] With the exception of science and mathematics, Geddes found that 'school lessons came easy' even though teaching practices were generally uninspiring. Perth Academy was later recalled by Geddes as 'an historic school not worse than others in Scotland, and in some respects, at least mathematically, better than most'.[76] In contrast,

---

[71] P. Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford, 1996), 260.

[72] P. Geddes, 'Talks from the Outlook Tower', in M. Stalley (ed.), *Patrick Geddes: Spokesman for Man and the Environment* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1972), 367–72; see also P. Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes: Biologist, Town Planner, Re-educator, Peace-Warrior* (London, 1978), 3–18; P. Kitchen, *A Most Unsettling Person*, 35–41; P. Mairet, *Pioneer of Sociology: The Life and Letters of Patrick Geddes* (London, 1957), 5–12; Meller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner*, 20–5; J. Scott and R. Bromley, *Visions of Reconstruction: Sociology and Social Renewal, 1880–1930*, ch. 4; A. Ziffren, 'Biography of Patrick Geddes', in M. Stalley, *Patrick Geddes: Spokesman for Man and the Environment*, 3–4.

[73] Meller, *Patrick Geddes*, 3.

[74] Geddes, 'Talks from the Outlook Tower', 372.

[75] Schools Inquiry Commission, *General Reports of Assistant Commissioners: Vol. VI, Burgh Schools in Scotland and Secondary Education in Foreign Countries* (London, 1868), 166.

[76] Ibid., 368–9.

Geddes was sensitised by an intellectually–and emotionally–stimulating home life and surrounding natural environment of the Tay valley–'my main good fortune lay before school days in a home modest enough in ordinary ways, but with a large garden'–and enjoyed vigorous physical games like football, while 'cricket seemed slow, and golf intolerably old and grownup'.[77]

Rote teaching and examination-based honours at school created in Geddes a deep ambivalence about the value of academic qualifications and titles. His precocious academic success at school was supplemented by wide-ranging interests without settling narrowly on any one. Conventional forms of school learning, relatively free of real world risks, failed to inculcate Geddes with a permanent disposition for gratuitous academic exercises, even as it confirmed his high-minded intellectual curiosity. Philip Mairet noted the source of Geddes' ambivalent disposition: 'the success of his school-days had given him something like contempt for scholastic competition: but people are not usually prone to undervalue pursuits in which they win special distinction'.[78] Talking about his own social origin as a 'cleft habitus', Bourdieu identified comparable contradictions and tensions:

> On the one hand, a recalcitrant disposition, especially towards the educational system, an alma mater with two contrasting faces which, no doubt because it was given the excessive attachment of an oblate,[79] was also the object of a violent, constant revolt springing from debt and disappointment. On the other hand, the self-assurance, even arrogance of the 'hyper-selected' student, who comes to see himself as the product of a miracle, yet self-created, capable of rising to every challenge.[80]

Geddes combined a similarly ambivalent distance from pure thought and the rituals of academic consecration with overweening self-belief. Bourdieu's methodical sociology of the French academic universe was motivated by 'the need to gain rational control over the disappointment felt by an "oblate" faced with the annihilation of the truths and values to which he was destined and dedicated, rather than take refuge in self-destructive resentment'.[81] Where a cleft habitus proved to be a precondition of Bourdieu's disciplined academic

[77] Ibid., 370.

[78] Mairet, *Pioneer of Sociology*, 14.

[79] Bourdieu means by an 'oblate' a teacher of humble origins who feels intense loyalty to an educational system that made their own success possible.

[80] Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity*, 111.

[81] P. Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Stanford, 1988), xxvi.

success, allowing him the symbolic profits of both academic recognition and transgression, Geddes' refractory habitus became a barrier to submitting to the harsh discipline of scholarship.

Table 1: Social class of students, Perth Academy 1868

1.	Landed proprietors	10
2.	Professionals	100
3.	Wholesale traders, merchants, etc	30
4.	Large retail traders, farmers, and 'superior employees'	100
5.	Small retail traders, shopkeepers, and 'inferior employees'	80
6.	Artisans, labourers, 'others of a parallel social grade'	0

Source: Schools Inquiry Commission, *General Reports of Assistant Commissioners: Vol. VI, Burgh Schools in Scotland and Secondary Education in Foreign Countries* (London, 1868), 166.

As a disenchanted oblate, Geddes took an altogether more heterodox path in an attempt to preserve his most cherished educational values. Emerging from a relatively modest position in the field of power as a bright, lower middle class boy from provincial Scotland, a fragmented social trajectory provided Geddes with an 'exemplary sociological education'.[82] Formative work and studies took Geddes from an apprenticeship in joinery, art lessons, assistant to a local chemist, a year as a bank clerk, a student in botany at Edinburgh University (lasting a week), a student of zoology with T. H. Huxley, work at University College London, biology studies in Paris, and research in Mexico. At each stage, Geddes' sense of intellectual independence deepened into what Boardman calls an 'oppositional compulsion':

> When someone's person or opinion was attacked, he would take the defence, as when Huxley scoffed at Comte's Positivism or Spencer's Sociology. Conversely, if a view or dogma was strongly or officially proclaimed, Geddes turned challenger or persecutor.[83]

Geddes steeped himself in the general currents of sociology at a time when he still hoped to make a name for himself as a natural scientist. He quickly abandoned his botanical studies at Edinburgh after being confronted

[82] L. Goldman, 'Foundations of British sociology 1880–1930: Contexts and biographies', *Sociological Review*, 55 (2007), 438.

[83] Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, 401.

with the classification of dead specimens rather than an understanding of living nature. As an alternative to conventional university study, Geddes sought out Huxley in London so that he might develop a feel for the game through intensive personal contact with a scientific authority. Even here an independent disposition led Geddes to challenge Huxley's private criticisms of Herbert Spencer's evolutionary sociology and his public critique of positivism.

Geddes acquired firsthand knowledge of positivism and the possibilities for synthesising social thought represented by Comte. Around the same time he was also enthused by John Ruskin's critique of the factory division of labour, somewhat tempering the 'survival of the fittest' Social Darwinism of Spencer.[84] In his mid-20s, Geddes encountered the social theory of Frederic Le Play after meeting Edmond Demolins in Paris and became a committed advocate of Le Play's schema of Place, Work and Family.[85] Geddes replaced the static notion of Family with the cultural traditions of 'Folk' and deepened the environmental emphasis by adopting the region as the natural unit for study from the work of the anarchist geographer Elisée Reclus.[86]

Geddes' cleft habitus and fragmented social trajectory helps situate his grand ambitions for an intellectual synthesis of Comte, Ruskin and Le Play. It also offers a sense of the unifying form given to his experiences by overlapping social circles. Such varied interests and social and physical mobility directly exposed Geddes to the virtues of generalism and a suspicion of disciplinary over-specialisation.[87] An inveterate classifier, Geddes refused to submit to classification himself. He was unable to adopt a fixed perspective from a stable scholastic position in social space. Even his revised Le Play system and 'notational machines' were attempts to accommodate complexity rather than reduce everything to a single axis around which his intellectual universe would rotate.

---

[84] P. Geddes, *John Ruskin, Economist* (Edinburgh, 1884).

[85] On the extensive network of French scientists, intellectuals and artists that Geddes cultivated see Sian Reynolds, *Paris-Edinburgh: Cultural Networks in the Belle Epoque* (Aldershot, 2007).

[86] T. Steele, 'Elisée Reclus and Patrick Geddes: Geographies of the Mind', *Journal of Generalism and Civics* (Summer, 2005), http://patrickgeddes.co.uk/summer_feature_reclus.html.

[87] M. Macdonald, 'Patrick Geddes and Scottish Generalism', in V.M. Welter. and J. Lawson (eds), *The City After Patrick Geddes* (Oxford, 2000).

Charisma and circle

In making a virtue out of necessity, Geddes straddled two worlds: the world of public commissions and the world of scientific authority. Intellectual and social boundaries bled into one another. This lent his sociology a certain ambiguity and contaminated it from the point of view of scholasticism. Geddes attempted to secure recognition for his sociological competence from wider social circles more concerned with practical interventions in urban space, disaster relief or international exhibitions. Here, the charismatic authority of Geddes' personal reputation for originality among social circles outweighed the objective productions of scholarship, creating inherent difficulties for academic recognition and scientific inheritance. Within the charmed circle of acolytes, the emotional and intellectual force of Geddes' personality was deeply felt. Outside this circle, however, Geddes' sociological vision could not be translated into the impersonal properties of a scientific paradigm or effect a symbolic revolution.

Time invested in strategies and reputations by Geddes was staked according to the potential for recognition from a given and a possible position in social space. A logic of 'social ageing' marked an ascending social trajectory where Geddes was engaged in successfully winning devotees, interpreters, collaborators, benefactors and audiences, followed later by a declining trajectory as sociological recognition and collaboration was withdrawn, even as official recognition was conferred in the form of a knighthood. The manner of Geddes' early rejection of scholasticism obstructed later recognition by disciplinary structures.

In the ascending social trajectory, Geddes felt the power of his own sense of importance and entitlement. Each practical success emboldened Geddes audaciously to seize new openings in social space, including or especially the most risky ventures, and to recover from a series of academic rejections. He naturally occupied the central space within a group, experiencing an innate capacity to practically realise his ambitions by the sheer energy of his presence.[88] Defined negatively in opposition to disinterested scholasticism and positively in terms of civic virtue, Geddes stood at the centre of disparate groups whose interests momentarily converged. Such eclecticism was never more apparent than collection of individuals grouped around the Sociological Society.[89]

---

[88] Mumford, *Sketches From Life: The Autobiography of Lewis Mumford, The Early Years*, 331.

[89] See Abrams, *The Origins of British Sociology, 1834–1914*, 102–10; J. Scott and C. T. Husbands, 'Victor Branford and the Building of British Sociology', *Sociological Review*, 55:3 (2007), 460–85.

Socially-constituted dispositions of habitus impelled Geddes to occupy positions in social space as the unrivalled charismatic leader of a devoted circle excluded from academic recognition and security. Overlapping circles of followers, aristocrats, industrialists, town planners, financiers, and activists, were predisposed to accept the unrelenting flow of Geddes' thought and language. A disillusioned Mumford bitterly depicted Geddes as engaged in incessant soliloquies, indifferent to contrary viewpoints, always demanding acquiescence from his circle.[90] His activist valorisation of the immediate circle stems, in part, from social origins that made a virtue of the generalist intellect in intimate contact with its social and natural environment.[91] A lasting mark was made on camp followers through a brilliant performance by Geddes the charismatic leader.

Removed from this milieu, however, scholasticism proved a more unforgiving judge. Practices which lack distance from worldly interests, even if prophetic, also tend to lack value on the academic market. Where Geddes' reputation as a gifted amateur sociologist appeared entirely legitimate to wider social circles it increasingly appeared within scholastic circles as a mark of incompetence and had the effect of de-legitimating his brand of sociology. Nevertheless, the personal energy, overweening self-confidence and forward momentum acquired early in life sustained Geddes through many setbacks and disappointments into old age.[92] Feeling the onset of a social trajectory entering decline, Geddes increasingly identified himself as an equal third partner to Comte and Le Play.[93] A physically ageing Geddes embarked in the 1920s on a failing and increasingly desperate strategy to find talented 'collaborators' to secure his intergenerational legacy within academic sociology.

> By this time [1920s], unfortunately, Geddes' encyclopaedic range of learning and his extensive systematization had taken on such huge proportions that he could scarcely handle them. He cried out for a collaborator capable of living with the same intensity, working with the same terrific energy, and writing on the same heroic scale as he himself lived and worked and thought.[94]

[90] See *Findings and Keepings: Analects for an Autobiography* and *Lewis Mumford and Patrick Geddes: The Correspondence*.

[91] MacDonald, 'Patrick Geddes and Scottish Generalism'.

[92] Mumford, *Sketches From Life: The Autobiography of Lewis Mumford*, 326.

[93] Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, 408.

[94] Mumford, 'Patrick Geddes, Victor Branford and applied sociology in England: The

In India, the search for collaborators was mixed. One talented student, G. S. Ghurye resented being indoctrinated into the Geddes system while N. A. Toothi relished the opportunity to work with the great man.[95] Radha Kamal Mukrkjee, a student from Calcutta, also took up the Geddesian approach with conviction, even if the intellectual debt was not always fully acknowledged.

In the Western hemisphere Geddes belatedly pursued Lewis Mumford, who had initiated a long-running correspondence with Geddes after coming across his work on biology at the age of eighteen. After meeting his hero in person, Mumford, with intellectual ambitions of his own, found the old man mercurial, high-handed and long-winded, as well as indifferent to Mumford's own ideas about how to build imaginatively on the sociology founded by Geddes:

> He wants all or nothing … and sets before one the thwarted ambitions and ideas of his own … His arrogance and his weakness have frustrated him; he lacks some internal stamina in spite of all his strength and energy; and is not merely a discouraged old man, but as I found out from things he dropped, he often fell into black discouragement as a young man.[96]

Geddes' social ageing caught up with him, explaining for Mumford 'all these incomplete endeavors, all those unverified hypotheses, whose rejection irritates him and whose proof, when others have given it, does not interest him'. For Mumford the social thought of the older man had calcified into a rigid dogma, which Geddes simply wanted to shore up rather than renovate. Mumford felt slighted that all Geddes required from him was that of a devoted secretary to put his affairs and thoughts in order, 'wanting me to take over this or that half-finished theme as a "legacy" from his "mingled heaps", ideas he himself, he knew in his heart, would never put together in any viable form no matter how long he might live'.[97] Although chosen, Mumford felt that he could not fulfil the contradictory demands that collaboration with Geddes entailed: 'The

---

social survey, regionalism and urban planning', in H.E. Barnes (ed.), *An Introduction to the History of Sociology*, 374.

[95] R. Mukherjee, 'Trends in Indian Sociology', *Current Sociology*, 25:3 (1977), 1–147. I. Munshi, 'Patrick Geddes: Sociologist, Environmentalist, and Town Planner, in P. Uneroi, N. Sundar and S. Deshpandar (eds.) (2008) *Anthropology in the East: Founders of Indian Sociology and Anthropology*, Oxford: Seagull.

[96] *Findings and Keepings: Analects for an Autobiography*, 100.

[97] Mumford, *Sketches From Life*, 329.

collaborator did not appear: those who had the mind had not the strength or the stamina, and those that had the necessary capacity for sacrifice and self-annihilation alas! did not have sufficient mind'.[98]

Attempts to convey his grand synthesis in articles and books, above all *Cities in Evolution*, foundered. In his final effort in Volume 2 of *Life*, Geddes set out to make 'a clear outline statement' of the essentials of sociology as 'social heritage' but expanded this into a formless, encyclopaedic theory of everything: 'the study of human and social groupings, in all their forms, aspects, and doings throughout time and space; and thus of archaeology and ecology (economics at its fullest and widest) and thence towards the better understanding of the course and character of social evolution'.[99] After half a century of intellectual and practical labours, Geddes remained singularly unable to set down a programmatic statement of how his sociology had progressed, let alone where it might lead.

Within a field of objective relationships, the particular properties of social space conditioned the possibilities for the successes and failures of Geddes' sociology. The antinomy of structure and disposition was mediated by the strategies that Geddes' adopted to conserve or subvert the set of positions that he took up in social space. A mark of the refractory habitus is being prepared to live with and even thrive under uncertainty, material privation and symbolic risk. Goldman, for instance, depicts Geddes as 'a type of social entrepreneur, sometimes intersecting with the key social movements of his age but often not, forging ahead on his own in his unique, and uniquely puzzling schemes and initiatives'.[100]

Lacking academic qualifications and weakly connected to the inner circles of metropolitan elites, Geddes frequently found himself positioned in dominated social space. He was repeatedly refused academic positions. In the 1880s alone he was turned down on four occasions for university chairs in the natural sciences (Edinburgh, 1881; Saint Andrews, 1882; Dundee, 1884; Edinburgh, 1888). Pulled in different directions, poor preparation by a distracted Geddes meant that he failed to be appointed in 1907 to the Chair of Sociology at the University of London, even though the post was endowed

[98] Mumford, 'Patrick Geddes, Victor Branford and applied sociology in England: The social survey, regionalism and urban planning', in H.E. Barnes (ed.), *An Introduction to the History of Sociology*, 374.

[99] J.A. Thomson, and P. Geddes, *Life: Outlines of General Biology, Volume Two* (London, 1931), 1304.

[100] Goldman, 'Foundations of British sociology 1880–1930', 439.

by his personal benefactor Martin White.[101] Such experiences deepened his suspicion of academic authorities, though not in the civilising mission of the modern university. Despite considerable testimonial support from scientists and students, a lack of formal qualifications, ready transgression of scholastic boundaries and public activism counted against him.

Academic exclusions were negatively transposed by Geddes into an ambivalent stance toward conventional university structures and disciplinary boundaries. Throughout, Geddes was acutely aware of the need for institutional legitimation. Scholastic titles confer the sort of academic prestige that would allow him to occupy a number of other positions in social space. In turn, these possibilities were perceived and valued from a position in social space free from unduly restrictive disciplinary or institutional commitments. Geddes eventually acquired a much coveted permanent position at the age of 35 in 1888 as Professor of Botany at Dundee. He occupied this post for thirty years while simultaneously immersed in community, cultural and educational activism as well his sociological studies. Unusual conditions determined by his personal benefactor Martin White allowed Geddes to teach for a few months in the summer, leaving him at liberty to pursue his other interests for the rest of the time. University authorities attempted to regulate his teaching and attendance, and even tried to force Geddes to move his home to Dundee.[102] Naturally, Geddes resisted every constraint on his autonomy and strategically deployed academic titles for wider recognition of his activities. Geddes quit Dundee in 1919 for a post as Professor of Civics and Sociology at the University of Bombay, a position again created specially for him.

Conclusion

Sociology was, and is, caught between the high stakes of strong external pressure and weak internal autonomy. After it supplanted religious authority, natural science enjoyed almost universal recognition and its object was rarely in dispute. Sociology, on the other hand, has as its object a form of knowledge that already circulates well beyond the scientific field. Scientific capital is constituted by the categories and perceptions acquired by qualified agents in the scientific field.[103] This endowment is performed through distinctive and

[101] Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes*, 231.

[102] Mairet, *Pioneer of Sociology*, 59.

[103] P. Bourdieu,. 'The specificity of the scientific field', in C.C.Lemert (ed), *French Sociology:*

distinguishing acts of knowledge and recognition, principally markers of originality and esoteric displays, while the acme of scientific contribution rests in the rarity value of a recognised name.

Canonical work is typically torn from its own origin in social and economic preconditions and raised up as a closed, finished product, universally translatable across time. It is only with great difficulty can Geddes' published work be removed from its time of composition and its value weighed against competitors. Of Geddes' most intensely sociological work, the Civics essays, the Dunfermline study, and *Cities in Evolution*, none are sufficiently free of the conditions that produced them, which retrospective scholasticism seeks to bracket off in order to demarcate a purely contemplative interest. Geddes' investment in the stakes of the game, determined by a refractory habitus in dominated and fractured social space, was not that of later scholastic classifiers of social theory staking their own claims for recognition.

Paradoxically, scholasticism can only be fought with the scholastic weapons of theoretical and methodological reflexivity.[104] By wagering initially on less prestigious areas of applied sociology, at least compared to Hobhouse's social philosophy, Geddes attempted to surmount the gap between knowledge and practice, but was also exposed to the force of scholastic demarcation disputes. Sociology yielded more readily to the legitimacy of Hobhouse's claim to scholastic power. In this situation, there is comfort in a circle: 'while Geddes undoubtedly saw himself as an intellectual, he realised that his role would have to be as much that of an intercessor of civic forms'.[105] Situated between social heteronomy and scientific autonomy, the extra-scientific social supports of Geddes' circle outweighed the internal logic of scientific legitimation. External compensations, commissions, grants, positions, publicity, public honours and leadership of a circle protected Geddes from internal scientific sanctions. Geddes' scientific capital as a university Professor of Botany was reconverted into the social capital of extensive networks, educational capital in the form of summer schools, cultural capital of exhibitions and art sponsorship, and economic capital generated to fund his various projects.

Ultimately, Geddes paid the price for his refractory habitus with the withdrawal of scholastic recognition. His attempt to assert dominance over the emerging sociological field was fatally hindered by the paucity of substantial scholastic productions. Some studies, principally the Dunfermline

Rupture and Renewal Since 1968 (New York, 1981), 2004.

[104] Bourdieu, *Practical Reason.*

[105] Osborne, and Rose, 'Spatial phenomenotechnics:', 219.

survey, may have been hailed by disciples but were too heterodox and not systematic or methodical in ways that could be readily translated to into the requirements of an emerging scientific orthodoxy. Geddes proved unable to impose his encyclopaedic definition of sociology on the field beyond a time when it was still relatively unformed and developing, and when he could still personally embody its practical-ethical demands. He bequeathed to sociological orthodoxy an epistemological mess of pottage that cannot be easily digested.

University of Abertay

Bibliography

Abrams, P. (1968) *The Origins of British Sociology, 1834–1914*, Chicago: Univeristy of Chicago Press.

Baehr, P.R. (2002) *Founders, Classics, Canons: Modern Disputes Over the Origins and Appraisal of Sociology's Heritage*, New Brunswick: Transaction.

Bannister, R.C. (2003) 'Sociology', in T.M. Porter and D. Ross (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Science: The Modern Social Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Barnes, H.E. (ed.) (1966) *An Introduction to the History of Sociology*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Becker, H. and Barnes, H.E. (1938) *Social Thought From Lore to Science, Volume III: Sociological Trends Throughout the World*, Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith.

Boardman, P. (1944) *Patrick Geddes: Maker of the Future*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Boardman, P. (1978) *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes: Biologist, Town Planner, Re-educator, Peace-Warrior*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Boudon, R. (1988) 'Will sociology ever be a normal science?', *Theory and Society,* 17. 5: 747–771.

Bourdieu, P. (1981) 'The specificity of the scientific field', in C.C.Lemert (ed.) *French Sociology: Rupture and Renewal Since 1968*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1988) *Homo Academicus*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1996) *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1998) *Practical Reason*, Cambridge : Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2000) *Pascalian Meditations*, Cambridge : Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2004) *Science of Science and Reflexivity*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bulmer, M. (ed.) (1985) *Essays on the History of British Sociological Research,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Burns, E.M. (1930) 'Great Britain', in E.R.A Seligman, (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, Volumes 1–2*, New York: Macmillan.

Bushan, B. (1989), *Anmol's Dictionary of Sociology*, New Dehli: Anmol.

Carver, T.N. (1905) *Sociology and Social Progress: A Handbook for Students of Sociology*, Boston: Ginn.

Case, C.M. (ed.) (1924) *Outlines of Introductory Sociology: A Textbook of Readings in Social Science*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co..

Connell, R.W. (1997) 'Why is classical theory classical?', *American Journal of Sociology*, 102.6: 1511–1557.

Dahrendorf, R. (1995) *LSE: A History of the London School of Economics and Political Science, 1895–1995*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Defries, A. (1927) *The Interpreter: Geddes, the Man and his Gospel*, London: George Routledge & Sons.

Durkheim, E. (1905) 'On the relation of sociology to the social sciences and to philosophy', *Sociological Papers*, London: Macmillan & Co.: 197–200.

Durkheim, E. (1982) *The Rules of Sociological Method*, London: Macmillan.

Durkheim, E and Fauconnet, E. (1905) 'Sociology and the social sciences', *Sociological Papers*, Macmillan & Co.: 258–280.

Findlay, J.J. (1920) *An Introduction to Sociology for Social Workers and General Readers*, Manchester: University Press/Longmans Green.

Fletcher, R. (1971) *The Making of Sociology: A Study of Sociological Theory, Volume 2: Developments*, London: Nelson.

Fuller, S. (2007) *Science Vs. Religion? Intelligent Design and the Problem of Evolution*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Geddes, P. (1884) *John Ruskin, Economist*, Edinburgh: W. Brown.

Geddes, P. (1905) 'Civics: As applied sociology', *Sociological Papers*, London: Macmillan & Co.: 101–118.

Geddes, P. (1972) 'Talks from the Outlook Tower', in M. Stalley (ed.) *Patrick Geddes: Spokesman for Man and the Environment*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Glass, R. (1989) *Clichés of Urban Doom and Other Essays*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Goldman, L. (2007) 'Foundations of British sociology 1880–1930: Contexts and biographies', *Sociological Review*, 55: 431–440

Guillory, J. (1993) *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Halliday, R. J. (1968) 'The sociological movement, the Sociological Society and the genesis of academic sociology in Britain', *Sociological Review*, 16: 377–398.

Halsey, A.H. (2004) *A History Of Sociology in Britain: Science, Literature, and Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hawthorn, G. (1976) *Enlightenment and Despair: A History of Sociology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

How, A.R. (2007) 'The author, the text and the canon: Gadamer and the persistence of classic texts in sociology', *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 7.1: 5–22.

Hysler-Rubin, N. (2011) *Patrick Geddes and Town Planning: A Critical View*, London: Taylor & Francis.

Johnston, R.J., Gregory, D., Pratt, G. and Watts, M. (eds.) (2000) *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Kitchen, P. (1975) *A Most Unsettling Person: The Life and Ideas of Patrick Geddes, Founding Father of City Planning and Environmentalism*, New York: Saturday Review Press.

Law, A. (2005) 'The Ghost of Patrick Geddes: Civics as applied sociology', *Sociological Research Online*, 10.2.

Law, A. (2010) 'Patrick Geddes', in R. Hutchison (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of Urban Studies*, Los Angeles: Sage.

Macdonald, M. (2000) 'Patrick Geddes and Scottish Generalism', in V.M. Welter. and J. Lawson (eds.) *The City After Patrick Geddes*, Oxford: Peter Lang.

MacIver, R.M. (1937) *Society: A Textbook of Sociology*, London: Macmillan.

Mairet, P. (1957) *Pioneer of Sociology: The Life and Letters of Patrick Geddes*, London: Lund Humphries.

Maus, H. (1962) *A Short History of Sociology*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Meller, H. (1990) *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner*, London: Routledge.

Mouzelis, N. (1997) 'In defence of the sociological canon: A reply to David Parker', *Sociological Review*, 45.2: 244–253.

Mukherjee, R. (1977) 'Trends in Indian Sociology', *Current Sociology*, 25.3: 1–147.

Mumford, L. (1966) 'Patrick Geddes, Victor Branford and applied sociol-

ogy in England: The social survey, regionalism and urban planning', in H.E. Barnes (ed.) *An Introduction to the History of Sociology*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Mumford, L. (1968) 'Patrick Geddes,' in D.L. Sills (ed.) *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Volumes 5–6, New York: Macmillan/ The Free Press.

Mumford, L. (1976) *Findings and Keepings: Analects for an Autobiography*, London: Secker & Warburg.

Mumford, L. (1979) *My Works and Days: A Personal Chronicle*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovenovich.

Mumford, L. (1982) *Sketches From Life: The Autobiography of Lewis Mumford*, The Early Years, Boston: Beacon Press.

Mumford, L. (1995) *Lewis Mumford and Patrick Geddes: The Correspondence*, F.G. Novak (ed.), London: Routledge.

Munshi, I. 'Patrick Geddes: Sociologist, Environmentalist, and Town Planner, in P. Uneroi, N. Sundar and S. Deshpandar (eds.) (2008) *Anthropology in the East: Founders of Indian Sociology and Anthropology*, Oxford: Seagull.

Odum, H.W. (1944) 'Patrick Geddes' Heritage to "The Making of the Future', *Social Forces*, 22.3: 275–281.

Osborne, T. and Rose, N. (2004) 'Spatial phenomenotechnics: making space with Charles Booth and Patrick Geddes', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 22: 209–228.

Park, R.E. and Burgess, E.W. (1921) *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Parker, M. (1997) 'Why bother with Durkheim? Teaching sociology in the 1990s', *Sociological Review*, 45.1: 122–146.

Pillaiwers, S.D. (1997) *Indian Sociology Through Ghurye: A Dictionary*, Mumbai: Popular Prakashan.

Raison, T. (ed.) (1969) *The Founding Fathers of Social Science*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Renwick, C. (2010) 'Patrick Geddes and the politics of evolution', *Endeavour*, 34.4: 151–156.

Renwick, C. and Gunn, R.C. (2008), Demythologizing the machine: Patrick Geddes, Lewis Mumford, and classical sociological theory. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 44: 59–76.

Reynolds, S. (2007) *Paris-Edinburgh: Cultural Networks in the Belle Epoque*, Aldershot, Ashgate.

Rumney, J. (1945) 'British Sociology', in G. Gurvitch and W.E. Moore (eds.)

Twentieth Century Sociology, New York: Philosophical Library.

Scott, J. (2007) 'The Edinburgh School of Sociology', *Journal of Scottish Thought*, 1.1: 89–102.

Scott, J. and Bromley, R. (2010) *Visions of Reconstruction: Sociology and Social Renewal, 1880–1930***,** http://sites.google.com/site/sociologysource/thebranfordproject

Scott, J. and Husbands, C.T. (2007) 'Victor Branford and the Building of British Sociology', with Christopher T. Husbands, *Sociological Review*, 55.3: 460–485.

Simmel, G. (2009) *Sociology: Inquiries Into the Construction of Social Forms*, Leiden: Brill.

Soffer, R. N. (1982) 'Why do disciplines fail? The strange case of British Sociology', *The English Historical Review,* 97: 385: 767–802.

Stalley, M. (ed.) (1972) *Patrick Geddes: Spokesman for Man and the Environment*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Studholme, M. (2008) 'Patrick Geddes and the history of environmental sociology in Britain: A cautionary tale', *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 8.3: 367–391.

Studholme, M., Scott, J. and Husbands, C.T. (2007) 'Doppelgängers and Racists: On Inhabiting Alternative Universes. A Reply to Steve Fuller's 'A Path Better Not to Have Been Taken", *Sociological Review*, 55, 4, 2007, 816–822.

Swingewood, A. (2000) *A Short History of Sociological Thought*, London: Palgrave/Macmillan (third edition).

Thomson, J.A. and Geddes, P. (1931) *Life: Outlines of General Biology, Volume Two*, London: Williams and Northgate.

Ward, C. (1991) *Influences: Voices of Creative Dissent*, Bideford: Green Books.

Weber, M. (1978) *Economy and Society*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Welter, V. (2002) *Biopolis: Patrick Geddes and the City of Life*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Ziffren, A. (1972) 'Biography of Patrick Geddes', in M. Stalley (ed.) (1972) *Patrick Geddes: Spokesman for Man and the Environment*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Zueblin, C. (1899) 'The world's first sociological laboratory', *American Journal of Sociology*, 4: 577–592.