

2018 06 27 - 2 The China narrative - and the narrative of an individual 'life in STS'

mh : 27 June

Lucy wrote

I think we don't have to add China in every narrative of the whole presentation.

The point about 'China' as a narrative frame is that it's the location of your own biographical practice - your own 'life in STS'. . . . just as 'Britain' is a frame for the narrative of mine. The 4S session is framed in terms of 'lives in STS', and the basic idea for this presentation which we are working on is to consider two 'lives in STS' - one in a 'Britain' frame and one in a 'China' frame. 'China' appears in the presentation because we are considering the possibility for a 'radical science' movement today, which could be generated through STS. China appears in the final parts of the story because yours is the life in STS **today** - and it is in China.

Today, I myself am not a practitioner in STS - except for 40 minutes in Sydney in August! In fact, my practice has not been within STS for a decade, since I left my last academic post in innovation management research at SPRU and published my last journal article in *The Journal of Technology and Innovation Management*. My practice today has deep roots, 45 years deep, in 'radical science' (and the historical study of 'radical science'); and **some** of that practice - in the 70s and again in the 90s - has been conducted 'in STS', but today STS is not the framing context for my activist, organic-intellectual, theory-of-practice practice. ¹ You and I both are historians of radical science. We both are activists in the construction of radical science - in particular generations, in particular geographical settings. But you are the one who is conducting that practice today **in STS**. This is why 'China' appears in the story all the way through, and at the 'end'.

Of course 'China' doesn't have to be in every sentence! But 'Britain' doesn't have to be in every sentence either. 'Britain' provides common ground, which makes it possible for you and I to have a conversation about radical science today; and the possibility of 'a third radical science movement' as Gary Werskey proposed; and to present that conversation to the 4S session. But - although the first two movements were in Britain² - the third may be anywhere, and perhaps it may be able to draw self-consciously on the historical study of the first two. In this session we're considering STS as a vehicle of the third, but of course it wasn't the vehicle of the first two, it didn't **exist** during the first

¹I'll write more about this in a separate note on 'not science'.

²Of course, also in the USA and the Netherlands and Australia and . . . where else? But Britain is the common ground that you and I share.

two, it appeared later, and my view is that STS, emerging in the 80s, is a 'political failure' of the declining radical science movement. But if we're considering possibilities of STS today, we have to be talking about China at the 'end' of the story, because this is the place where these two STS lives have an intersection **today**. There is no present-day intersection of these stories, in STS, in Britain today. Even though the organic-intellectual theory-of-practice continues more strongly than ever (in 'movements' and class-conscious cultural formations), I have 'retired' as far as that kind of professional activity is concerned.

The histories are not 'over', they are being mobilised today, as stories of 'where we have been' and 'where we might go' and 'how the two differ and are related'. This is why you and I study history? You are choosing to study some historical movements in Britain in order to present different possibilities for practice today in China. But the theorising - as reflexive theory-of-practice (and not just theory of someone else's **past** practice) must centrally include your own practice today - the practice of STS as 'a field' today, your own practice of STS in China today, the movements that are available or possible in China today. Equally, it must centrally include the practice of this 'radical science' veteran in Britain today, in domains that are not essentially about 'science' and only secondarily about 'technology'. But they are centrally about **governance**.

This is where it gets interesting! I have a sense which has emerged just in the past couple of years, since I began to be involved in 'radical science' legacy, and since you and I met at the Radical Technology gathering in Bristol. The sense is that there is a very powerful formation which is emerging, worldwide: a 'movement for the commons'. It's a movement against the State as a controlling force 'above' people, which plays a part in enforcing relations of production in everyday life and work, and against capital as a controlling force in the organising of the forces of production as they powerfully evolve. It's a movement for the protection of what is held in common by all people as means of life, across the planet. The movement for the commons pays a great deal of attention to knowledges - the production of knowledges, the mobilisation of knowledges - in distributed networks of people, working in direct peer-to-peer (P2P) production relationships: it's motto is 'design global, build local'. The movement also pays a great deal of attention to technology: specifically, the technologies that exist and are emerging in the internet and in 'the cloud', and the ways in which these forces of production are being mobilised for capital and also for P2P production. These furnish obvious, very strong connections with STS as a field of study. But the movement for the commons is not 'about' science, or technology; it is about governance. 'A commons' is a collection of resources, curated and stewarded by a community through the direct contribution and peer-to-peer participation and self-management of its mem-

bers, under agreed rights and obligations. It is the self-consciously constructed and governed activity of '**commoning**' which is crucial, rather than the resources themselves (natural resources, cultural resources, knowledge resources, means of subsistence, equipment, the built environment of cities, land, etc etc).

It seems to me that this is the most important movement that has arisen in my lifetime as an activist: where all understanding about the historical production and deployment of knowledges should pay off; and where all understanding of technology-mediated relationships between persons and material objects (including our own bodies) should be brought into focus. The contemporary Commons movement is not 'Marxist' - but it could be *historical* and *materialist*; it could be informed by a '*cultural materialist*' way of theorising and an organic intellectual *mode* of theorising practice. This could be Gary's 'third movement': not a radical science movement, but a radical knowing-and-material-organising movement with a very strong, theoretically-informed, grasp of modes of knowing, modes of governance and power, historical modes of production and cultural formations, and modes of acting-through-technologies. Sounds like STS? Could be.

This movement for The Commons could be made-present in the evolving practice of governance of biotech in China? It could be an instance of Gary's projected 'third radical science movement'?

Participation of 'lives in STS', in the global movement for The Commons, is the 'political experiment' that I feel can be proposed as 'the end' of the Sydney 4S story. 'China' and 'Britain' are just the instance that you and I happen to have detailed, participant access to, because of the features of these two particular 'lives in STS' and the way in which we are making them intersect.