12 Writing for Influence

Social Scientists, *New Society* and the Politics of Social Change

Lise Butler, Jane Elliott and Jon Lawrence

Introduction

Speaking in 1998, Ray Pahl explained how, following the publication of his classic sociological study *Divisions of Labour* in 1984, he had been invited to Downing Street to meet with Mrs Thatcher's 'Smart-suited advisors'. This is how he recalled the experience:

> They sort of listened to what I had to say. And the interesting thing was that all my clever social science, – they didn't really pay much attention to. But when I told them one or two anecdotes, they completely believed it.[1]

It may have been 'clever social science' that secured Pahl access to Number 10, but what captured people's attention, and potentially changed their minds, was human interest. Even when speaking to Thatcherite policy advisers, Pahl found he needed a good story to bring his carefully constructed survey data to life. This should not be surprising. It is widely acknowledged that the narrative form has greater power to hold and influence an audience than most other styles of writing: a good case study is always likely to be more arresting than a table of statistics.[2] On the other hand, enumeration has been at the heart of the state's ability to know, organise and control civil society for more than two centuries.[3] Hence for social scientists, literary and numeracy skills generally go hand-in-hand when trying to convey knowledge about the social world to those in power. Theirs is a very specific genre of political

[1] Paul Thompson, 'Pioneers of Social Research, 1996–2018' [data collection], 4th Edition (2019). DOI: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-6226-6, Ray Pahl Interview Transcript, 6226int026, pp. 107–8.

[2] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (London: Penguin, 2011); Sarah Dillon and Claire Craig, *Storylistening: Narrative Evidence and Public Reasoning* (London: Routledge, 2021).

[3] Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998); Tom Crook and Glen O'Hara, 'The Torrent of Numbers: Statistics and the Public Sphere in Britain, c. 1800–2000', in *Statistics and the Public Sphere: Numbers and the People in Modern Britain, c. 1800–2000*, ed. Tom Crook and Glen O'Hara (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 1–31.

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writing – mostly produced as a by-product of other types of writing, initially generated for academic peers.

This chapter examines how UK social scientists have conceptualised writing as a practice, and how they have understood the challenge of writing to influence a non-specialist audience, whether that be government policymakers or the general public. We draw on two main sources, the UK Data Archive's 'Pioneers of Social Research' interview collection, and the popular weekly social science magazine *New Society* (1962–88), which for nearly three decades gave social scientists a prominent platform to experiment with non-academic styles of writing. When considering political writing or 'writing for influence' among social scientists, a helpful distinction can be made between *instrumental* impact, which seeks to use research evidence directly to inform policy or professional practice, and *conceptual* impact, which focusses more broadly on changing understandings and conceptualisations of a social problem. The use of 'Impact Case Studies', in the UK's Research Excellence Framework since 2014, has increasingly persuaded British academics to focus on the former. However, as we will demonstrate below, the political writing of social scientists in the 1970s and 1980s should perhaps be better understood as designed to have conceptual impact – that is, to reframe the terms of public debate, to refocus research on new areas, or to look beyond the immediately observed in order to understand the deeper causes of hardship, inequality and negative social processes.

The 'Pioneers of Social Research' collection was compiled by the sociologist Paul Thompson between 1996 and 2018. The current archive includes lengthy biographical interviews with 56 individuals born between 1906 and 1949.[4] These interviewees are exceptionally articulate and reflexive, and the transcripts of their conversations often run to over seventy pages. The biographical interview guide does not specifically ask them to reflect on their experience of writing or on the influence or impact that their work has had. Arguably this is a methodological strength rather than a weakness; what they say about writing is essentially spontaneous. Across the interviews, individuals often mention their writing practice, different styles or genres of writing, and the power dynamics underlying the production of, and recognition for, written outputs. Indeed, some interviewees provide detailed discussion of the process of writing and working on texts with editors and co-authors.

[4] For this chapter, we have focussed mainly on interviews with twelve individuals included in the collection: Michael Young, Peter Townsend, Peter Hall, Ruth Finnegan, Sandra Wallman, Ray Pahl, John Goldthorpe, John Bynner, Harvey Goldstein, David Hargreaves, Ann Oakley and Janet Finch.

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We have used insights from across the interviews to shape our approach to understanding social scientists as *political* writers. As case studies we focus on three prominent social scientists who combined scholarly writing with frequent contributions to *New Society*: the urban planner and geographer Peter Hall, and the sociologists Ann Oakley and Ray Pahl. Our interest is in how different genres and forms of writing may be more, or less, effective in ensuring that social research reaches those outside of academia. Many of the social researchers interviewed for the *Pioneers* project have worked specifically to understand the social worlds of people who lack power and influence, and a key motivation for many was therefore to 'get people's stories told'. However, what each of these social scientists has grappled with is the tension between writing that will pass muster with academic colleagues, and writing that is vibrant, and direct enough to reach the wider public, or to 'speak to power'. Each social scientist has found their own (partial) solution to this problem, and by reflecting on some of their common challenges and themes we hope to provide insights relevant to academic practice today.

New Society was an intellectual space that represented and reflected the close relationship between social science, politics, and culture in 1960s and 1970s Britain. It was published between 1962 and 1988, when it was amalgamated with the *New Statesman* to become the *New Statesman and Society* and was conceived as a social scientific counterpart to the already successful popular science weekly *New Scientist* – its first editor, the future Conservative Cabinet Minister Timothy Raison, was the son of *New Scientist* and *Picture Post* editor Max Raison. As Mike Savage has observed, *New Society* served as a vehicle for the 'almost missionary zeal for the role of the social sciences in contributing to national prosperity and social advance' that emerged in the early 1960s.[5] It reflected the intellectual and cultural prominence of the social sciences, and increasing confidence in their explanatory power and relevance for policy making. (This was a function more cynically portrayed by the novelist Barbara Trapido in her 1982 novel *Brother of a More Famous Jack*, in which the bohemian philosophy don Jacob Goldman describes *New Society* as 'Cooked up by the kind of chaps who need fifteen-hundred-pound research grants from the Social Science Research Council before they can tell you the way to the nearest brothel.')[6] In the words of the journalist Paul Barker, who edited the weekly between 1968 and 1986,

[5] Mike Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 113.

[6] Barbara Trapido, *Brother of the More Famous Jack* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022 [1982]), p. 67.

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New Society sought to 'bridge the gap between thinkers and policy makers', 'to tell the manager what the psychologist has to say, to make the town planner aware of what the social anthropologist is revealing, to inform the local government official or councillor of the trends revealed by the demographer, to enable the magistrate to know what the criminologist has to offer, and – in each case, equally important – vice versa'.[7]

Under Barker's editorship *New Society*'s focus included social policy, politics, and popular culture. In addition to extensive social policy coverage, it examined the diverse themes and moral panics of the 1960s and 1970s, with anthologies on youth culture, delinquency, immigration, and the deepening cultural and economic divides in British society. In bridging journalism, culture, social research and social policy, *New Society* provided an important venue for social scientists to write politically for a wider public.

The Political Writing of Social Scientists

A central theme that emerges from the 'Pioneers of Social Research' interviews is the importance of 'journalistic' writing and the ability of some social scientists to use publications such as *New Society* and *The Guardian* to get their ideas into the mainstream and potentially to influence policy and political thinking. This type of journalism has two purposes. First, it is a way of sharing ideas with a large public audience, certainly much wider than that which would be expected to read academic journals and monographs. But second, it can serve as an irritant or provocation, and in some ways force policy makers and ministers into engaging with academic research, concepts and argument.

The urbanist Peter Hall described how, partly influenced and persuaded by John Vaizey, a politically well-connected social scientist, he began to write for a non-academic audience: 'I started writing articles on London planning issues … I'd always had rather a penchant for journalism, I have to say, having written reviews for *Varsity* [the Cambridge University student paper], and also the Cambridge reviews on films, I turned to writing journalism, which I rather enjoyed doing.'[8] The sociologists Ann Oakley and Ray Pahl were two other pioneers of social research who explicitly talked about writing for *New Society*. For example, early in her career Oakley wrote the influential essay 'The

[7] Paul Barker, 'Painting the Portrait of "the Other Britain"', *Contemporary Record* 5:1 (1991), pp. 45–61, p. 47 and 'Society and New Society', *New Society* (4 October 1962), p. 4.

[8] Thompson, *Pioneers*, Peter Hall, Interview Transcript, 6226int016, p. 17.

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Myth of Motherhood', while Pahl describes how he 'was regularly writing for *New Society*, that's a thing that I haven't mentioned, but I was regularly doing journalism, and some people I've met since then, only know me as a *New Society* writer. I enjoyed doing that.'[9]

As these comments suggest, many social scientists were acutely conscious of the different registers required to write for academic colleagues and to write persuasively and accessibly for a public audience (doing 'journalism'). Anthropologist Ruth Finnegan humorously remembers her mother declaring that her BLitt dissertation was written in 'horribly pompous language' before saying, 'I hope I've tried, ever since, to avoid that'.[10] The educational theorist David Hargreaves was also blunt about the reasons that academics have so little impact on policy. Reflecting on his time working as Chief Inspector of Schools (having previously been an academic at Oxford) he explained that he 'put most of the blame with the academics' because 'the[ir] writing was too obscure, it was too difficult, there was no real attempt to communicate with people and talk it through'.[11]

A second strand in the 'Pioneers' interviews is the theme of 'speaking for the people', where social science writing is understood as inherently political because it seeks to give a voice to the marginalised and the silenced.[12] The pioneering use of qualitative methods, and more specifically the popularity of narrative methods that developed from the mid-1980s onwards, is particularly relevant here.[13] Writing up encounters collected in the field can be particularly powerful. Finnegan emphasises that the stories included in her book *Tales of the City*[14] provided a helpful set of counter narratives to the stories told about Milton Keynes by the Development Corporation as they were building it. 'There were stories told by "ordinary" (in inverted commas) people living in Milton Keynes – their own kind of life stories and their take on it – and I wanted to have a book that would talk about all of those, and in a

[9] Thompson, *Pioneers*, Ray Pahl Interview Transcript, 6226int026, p. 94.
[10] Thompson, *Pioneers,* Ruth Finnegan, Interview Transcript 6226int012, p. 28.
[11] Thompson, *Pioneers,* David Hargreaves, Interview Transcript 6226int017, p. 56.
[12] See Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[13] Starting with the work of Eliot Mischler in medical sociology, who argued that individuals should be encouraged to give lengthy narrative responses in interviews and not feel constrained to fit their responses into a set of analytic categories pre-determined by the researcher. E. G. Mishler, *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).
[14] Finnegan, R., *Tales of the City: A Study of Narrative and Urban Life*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

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way, kind of a bit unpack the sociologists' stories.'[15] Oakley makes a similar point about using research to give voice to people with less power in relation to her work on motherhood. She describes the process of publishing her book *Becoming a Mother* (1979), and how she wanted to reverse the conventions of academic writing such that her text was in italics 'and the bold text is what the women said. I had a big struggle with the publisher to ensure that we reversed the fonts'.[16]

A third theme to emerge in the interviews with social scientists is the slippage or tension between being a writer of fiction and being an academic. A few, such as Oakley and the anthropologist Sandra Wallman, had experience of both genres of writing. Oakley suggested that 'the borderline between fact and fiction is actually much more blurred than many people accept' and explained that in the process of writing a novel: 'I put into the mouths of characters things that people have actually said in interviews, as I suppose a different way of making the same point, or a way of reaching a different kind of audience.'[17] Wallman also briefly discussed her love of writing fiction – specifically short stories – and the liberation of not needing to support fictional writing with evidence in the way that is crucial in research: 'I remember [the anthropologist Raymond] Firth always used to say to us, "What's the evidence?" "What's the evidence?" Well, if you're writing a short story, you don't need the evidence, and you've got to get off that, and fly with it a bit.'[18]

For other social scientists there was an acknowledged tension between different writing styles, even within the same research collaboration. The sociologist Peter Townsend described how he and his colleague Michael Young each conceived of good writing differently when they were at the Institute of Community Studies (ICS), an east London-based social research organisation explicitly oriented towards policy impact.[19] Townsend described his work as 'more academically or objectively inclined' in comparison to Young's more 'political' style. Townsend described Young as wanting 'the story to be unvarnished, and rather powerful and rounded and well-expressed, and without its hesitations, qualifications and exceptions': Young, he said, would 'come in very

[15] Thompson, *Pioneers,* Ruth Finnegan, Interview Transcript 6226int012, p. 71.
[16] Thompson, *Pioneers*, Ann Oakley, Interview Transcript, 6226int025, p. 33.
[17] Thompson, *Pioneers*, Ann Oakley, Interview Transcript, 6226int025, p. 33.
[18] Thompson, *Pioneers*, Sandra Wallman Interview Transcript, 6226int031, p. 46.
[19] Lise Butler, 'Michael Young, the Institute of Community Studies, and the Politics of Kinship', *Twentieth Century British History* 26:2 (June 2015), pp. 203–24; Lise Butler, *Michael Young, Social Science and the British Left, 1945–1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 108.

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heavily … at the editorial stage of the [ICS] books'.[20] In his own interview for the Pioneers of Social Research collection, Young emphasised the need to allocate at least half of a research project's time to the writing up of material because of the difficulty of adequately capturing 'the unusual small things that happen, that caught your attention, and giving them proper … proper space in your writing, I mean, as a novelist would do'. It was the documentation of everyday materialities that he felt were 'most evocative of the style of life'.[21]

In a similar vein, Ray Pahl discussed the potential value of a more fictionalised style in representing research findings. With reference to his work on the experiences of employment and unemployment on the Isle of Sheppey he explained: 'I felt that it almost needed a soap opera to describe people's lives and the complexities and so forth, to get the depth of it, almost fictionalizing in part of it.' Pahl also commented on the importance of the visual to make an impression 'and that's one of the reason[s] why we've got photographs in the book … maybe to make a film about it would have been good'.[22]

The *Pioneers* interviews also shed light on the importance of social networks to writing for influence. It is striking how often social researchers mention personal contacts when explaining how they came to write for popular outlets like *New Society*. Anthropologist Mary Douglas explained how she wrote her first pieces on contemporary Western society for the magazine because she knew both Tim Raison and Paul Barker socially; 'they asked me to write so I was happy to do those things'.[23] Similarly, Peter Hall recalled first writing for *New Society* after a chance meeting with Raison, and going on to be a sort of house writer for the magazine through his strong friendship with Barker, Raison's successor as editor. Hall wrote a weekly column for *New Society* for many years, describing himself as part of Barker's 'own favourite gang of people'.[24]

Writing for *New Society* was also a good way to *develop* networks and thereby advance one's career. In the 'Pioneers' interviews, both Leonore Davidoff and Ann Oakley recall being asked to write major essays for the magazine as graduate students. Indeed, Oakley recalls that after writing

[20] Thompson, *Pioneers*, Peter Townsend, Interview Transcript, 6226int030, p. 66.
[21] Thompson, *Pioneers*, Micheal Young, Interview Transcript, 6226int032, p. 13. The classic critique of the Institute's approach is Jennifer Platt, *Social Research in Bethnal Green: An Evaluation of the Work of the Institute of Community Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1971).
[22] Thompson, *Pioneers*, Ray Pahl Interview Transcript, 6226int026, p. 114.
[23] Thompson, *Pioneers*, Mary Douglas, Interview Transcript, 6226int008, pp. 66–67.
[24] Thompson, *Pioneers*, Peter Hall, Interview Transcript, 6226int016, pp. 26–27.

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her provocative essay on 'The myth of motherhood' (1970) for *New Society*, Barker helped her secure a contract to write *Sex, Gender and Society* for the magazine's influential book series 'Towards a New Society'.[25] The magazine could also have a decisive impact on the careers of more established scholars. Hall, for example, recalls how a *New Society* exchange about the transformation of urban community with the California-based urban designer Mel Webber helped forge the intellectual networks that would lead him to join the Berkeley faculty in 1979.[26]

But writing for *New Society* also required social researchers consciously to adapt their style to suit a different, broader audience – hence Pahl's comment about 'regularly doing journalism'.[27] Pahl clearly valued this ability to switch styles, and thereby reach a wider audience, but also appeared to regret that readers of the magazine could be unaware of the academic work that underpinned his popular writing. Interestingly, Peter Hall's reflections on his relationship with *New Society* sprang from a discussion in his 'Pioneers' interview about his book *World Cities* being one of his 'more journalistic', prompting him to muse: 'I'm perhaps as much an academic journalist as an academic in the true sense.… I've always written to communicate. Absolutely. I've always written [for] an imaginary "intelligent member of the general public".' Indeed, it was this claim that led him to digress into a discussion about the fundamental importance of *New Society*, not just to him personally, but to social science as a discipline in its golden age.[28] In the next section, we will look more closely at the practice of three of these social science 'Pioneers' in their writing for *New Society*.

Writing for New Society

In this section we offer 'case studies' of three 'Pioneers' of social research: Peter Hall, Ann Oakley, and Ray Pahl. We discuss the extent and nature of their writing for *New Society*, exploring how this changed over time and what sorts of influence they sought to achieve by writing for a popular weekly magazine.

[25] Thompson, *Pioneers*, Leonore Davidoff, Interview Transcript, 6226int006, p. 50; Thompson, *Pioneers*, Ann Oakley, Interview Transcript, 6226int025, pp. 12–13; Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1972). For a subtle exploration of Oakley's connections to the world of academic social science as the daughter of Richard Titmuss see Ann Oakley, *Father and Daughter: Patriarchy, Gender and Social Science* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2014).
[26] Thompson, *Pioneers*, Peter Hall, Interview Transcript, 6226int016, pp. 35–36.
[27] Thompson, *Pioneers*, Ray Pahl Interview Transcript, 6226int026, p. 95.
[28] Thompson, *Pioneers*, Peter Hall, Interview Transcript, 6226int016, p. 26.

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Peter Hall

Hall was a prolific contributor to *New Society* throughout the publication's two-and-a-half-decade run, and his vast output for the magazine cannot easily be condensed here. Hall regularly contributed to the weekly from 1963 to 1987. Alongside numerous feature articles, Hall reviewed dozens of planning publications from the UK, continental Europe, Asia and the United States, frequently commenting on the state of British planning vis-a-vis its international counterparts. His impressive output for *New Society* explored the frameworks and assumptions that drove not just urban planning, but economic and political planning more broadly.

Hall's academic work was inseparable from his prose styling: he described his first book, the 1963 *London 2000*, as 'an exercise in academic polemic'.[29] Most of Hall's writings for *New Society* were also in some sense *political* – Hall used the framework of urban planning to comment on the problems of state planning more generally, and the increasing impotence of technocratic policy making as the optimism and high growth of the post-war period waned in the 1970s and 1980s. One of Hall's most notorious planning interventions in *New Society* was the 1969 essay 'Non-Plan: An Experiment in Freedom', co-authored with critic Reyner Banham, the architect Cedric Price, and editor Paul Barker. 'Non-Plan' advocated zones free of planning regulation where people could 'shape their own environment'.[30] The ideas articulated in 'Non-Plan' provided inspiration for the Thatcher and Reagan governments to introduce 'enterprise zones' and 'freeports', zones of limited planning regulation and low tax which remain central to current Conservative economic thinking – though Hall later sought to distance himself from the policy.[31]

Hall's challenge to *dirigiste* physical planning in 'Non-Plan' followed on broader calls for the reform of the British planning apparatus. He challenged the regional development frameworks which had guided British urban planning since the end of the Second World War, and argued that post-war population explosion, and increasing expectations

[29] Peter Hall, 'Preface', in *London 2000* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967 [1963]), p. 13.

[30] Reyner Banham, Paul Barker, Peter Hall, and Cedric Price, 'Non-plan: An Experiment in Freedom', *New Society* (20 March 1989), pp. 435–43; Sam Wetherell, 'Freedom Planned: Enterprise Zones and Urban Non-Planning in Post-War Britain', *Twentieth Century British History* 27:2 (2016), pp. 266–89.

[31] Daniel Stedman-Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 315–20; Otto Saumarez Smith, 'Action for Cities: The Thatcher Government and Inner City Policy', *Urban History* 47:2 (2020), pp. 1–19, p. 10; 'Enterprise Zones and Freeports Revisited', *New Society* (24 March 1982), pp. 460–62.

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of home and motor vehicle ownership, meant that existing regional development plans for managing the spread of London's population were no longer adequate. Hall also called for new models of planning which empowered more localised development agencies, and which were based on social processes and problems rather than the physical form of buildings or cities.[32] While 'Non-Plan' and many of Hall's reviews and essays for *New Society* in the 1960s and 1970s reflected a radical desire to disrupt and humanise urban planning, his contributions to the journal also reveal a more cynical view of utopian and activist trends in his field. While strongly committed to a vision of planning which reflected the real needs and experiences of residents, he warned against the 'the fashionable obsession' increasingly common in the academy for 'urban planning as a system of social justice (or injustice)'.[33]

Hall wrote in a stylised, oratorial, and imaginative way, using vivid and sometimes digressive imagery, and often approached the main topics of his reviews and essays in *New Society* indirectly. A 1964 article on water supply in the North-West of England deployed geography and natural history to frame a technical planning issue in almost novelistic terms:

> On the northwest coast of England, within 100 miles as the crow flies, the sea rose at the end of the Ice Age and produced five great inlets: the Dee, Mersey, and Ribble estuaries, Morecambe Bay and Solway Firth. The Mersey apart, their potential remains undeveloped.[34]

Similarly, Hall evocatively contextualised trends in English urban planning by situating them in their social and political context: a 1974 essay on the use of 'structure plans', a comprehensive approach to future land use planning, opens: 'Back in 1965, in the days of the Beatles and the National Plan and technological white heat, the idea of the structure plan emerged'.[35] Through vivid geographical and historical imagery, Hall brought planning policy to life.

The overwhelming majority of Hall's interventions in planning policy for *New Society* in the 1960s and 1970s were reviews of books and published planning reports, which he used as springboards for

[32] 'London Revised Upwards', *New Society* 42 (18 July 1963), pp. 7–9; 'Social Planning', *New Society* (10 May 1973), pp. 353–536, p. 535; 'Urban Insights', *New Society* (25 October 1973), p. 225.

[33] 'The Planners and the Public', *New Society* (22 March 1973), pp. 641–43; 'Volks for Folks', *New Society* (30 November 1972), pp. 523–24; 'Urban Agonies', *New Society* (16 August 1973), pp. 408–9.

[34] Peter Hall, 'Which Barrage in the North-West?', *New Society* (10 December 1964), pp. 6–8, p. 6.

[35] Peter Hall, 'The New "Structure Plans": The West Midlands Case', *New Society* (21 March 1974), p. 701.

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commentary on trends in the planning profession. In these reviews, Hall introduced even the most technical planning literature with flair and humour. About a report on canal use planning between 1939 and 1947 Hall wrote 'The cover is sober Stationery Office blue, the contents mark a kind of revolution.'[36] In a review of a monograph on colonial urban development Hall described the author as having 'taken an enormous and well aimed bite at a succulent academic apple'.[37] His reviews often served as vehicles for arch commentary on the planning profession as a whole: about a 1975 text-book on urban planning problems, published in the context of mounting economic turmoil, he remarked, 'Publishers, ever more dinosaur-like, as their responses are slowed by lack of paper, or electricity, or sugar for printers' bloodstreams, seem faithfully to reflect the urgent concerns of half a decade ago.'[38] In turns flowery and funny, Hall translated specialist debates in his field into accessible and culturally relevant social and political commentary.

Hall's contributions to *New Society*, especially by the 1980s, reflected a broader disillusionment with the role and impact of urban planning in British society. 'Decline' had altered the purposes of planning itself: deindustrialisation and slowing growth had shifted the focus of British planners from urban and suburban expansion to managing social decline in the inner city, meanwhile urban regeneration policies themselves could have only limited impact on communities whose ailments stemmed from a broader crisis in British capitalism.[39] In 1979, Hall observed that planners and the planning profession had suffered from both public dissatisfaction with large scale urban development, and the tension between planners' optimistic visions and social reality:

> In the happy world of the architect's drawings it was always different: a perpetual Mediterranean summer, populated by a liberated (but well adjusted) middle class population.… But in a world of youth unemployment and punk rock, that wasn't the face the reconstructed urban Britain came to wear.

As the energies of planners had been redirected away from bold visions of suburban expansion, and towards managing the problem of the 'inner cities', Hall observed that, 'the blood and the fire have gone out of British planning. It isn't that the planning machine has shut down – far from it.… What has gone is not the substance, but the spirit.' And *New Society* itself, Hall added, was a barometer for this shift: 'it used to carry planning

[36] Peter Hall, 'Sahibsville', *New Society* (9 December 1976), pp. 526–27, p. 526.
[37] Peter Hall, 'Sealed World', *New Society* (4 September 1975), pp 353–536, p. 535
[38] Peter Hall, 'Si Monumentum', *New Society* (9 January 1975), pp. 82–83, p. 82.
[39] 'The Inner Cities Dilemma', *New Society* (3 February 1977), pp. 223–25; 'The Social Crisis', *New Society* (22 November 1985), pp. 320–22

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notes almost every week; now, as much as a month can pass by without anything noteworthy'.[40]

In the 1980s, as he entered his fifties, Hall's writings became both more self-referential and more speculative. He occasionally broke into the first person, describing his own misgivings at using his new personal computer ('It gives me no excuse for being less than perfect. It's positively scary.') and, in a moment of what he called 'male-menopausal self-analysis', lamented his failure to capitalise on his own foresight about social trends ('every decade I identify some great growth industry, do precisely nothing about it, and watch someone else make a fortune out of it').[41] The frenetic pace of his reviewing slowed, he published fewer, but more involved feature pieces, and he increasingly ventured beyond urban planning into historical sociology and social forecasting.

Over the course of two and a half decades, Peter Hall was a prominent voice for geography and urban planning in *New Society*. Through prolific reviews and feature essays he both critiqued the professional norms and idealism of his fellow urbanists, and brought their work to life through vivid, descriptive, and often funny prose. Echoing and articulating broader critiques of post-war planning, Hall's 'academic polemic' melded planning, policy, and personal reflections to illustrate the transformations of Britain's cultural and social geography in the context of de-industrialisation and decline.

Ann Oakley

As discussed above, Ann Oakley started writing for *New Society* relatively early in her career. She had already provided three articles for the magazine between February 1970 and March 1971 when she was still in her mid-twenties.[42] Each of these is written in a formal essay style, with no humour or personal narrative. While the first and third make their arguments with reference to the work of others, the second article 'Occupation Housewife' centres on Oakley's own PhD research in which she aimed to study housework as if it were paid employment (interestingly she focusses only on the results of her pilot study with eight women in this piece but still draws some clear conclusions). As she writes in the article: 'I thought it would be possible to study the housewife in her work

[40] 'Whatever Happened to Planning?', *New Society* (17 May 1979), pp. 384–385.
[41] Peter Hall, 'My Flivver Computer', *New Society* (24 February 1983), pp. 303–6, p. 303; Peter Hall, 'In Pursuit of the Past', *New Society* (7 April 1983), pp. 21–22, p. 21.
[42] Ann Oakley, 'The Myth of Motherhood', *New Society* (26 February 1970), pp.348–50, 'Occupation Housewife' *New Society* (13 August 1970), pp. 282–84 and 'Sisters Unite', *New Society* (11 March 1971), pp. 390–93.

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situation just as the assembly-line worker in a factory has been studied – examining on the one hand, work conditions … and on the other, work satisfaction.'[43] Oakley spends most of the article discussing her results and giving voice to the women she interviewed by quoting them verbatim. Oakley's conclusions are profoundly political and hard hitting. She writes that: 'Women in our society are oppressed and as housewives they are alienated workers. Recognition of the first fact enables the break in the equation of femininity with domesticity to be made, and the existence of alienation to be realised.'[44] The adoption of the Marxist language of 'alienation' and quotation of Lenin's pronouncement on housework as 'exceptionally petty, barbarous and arduous' help to sharpen the political edge of the piece.

Oakley wrote a further five articles for *New Society* between 1978 and 1980 which could all broadly be said to focus on gender politics.[45] Although two of these make explicit reference to Oakley's own empirical research,[46] these articles are not accessible summaries of a single piece of research. Rather Oakley's approach is to summarise a range of empirical studies to provide the evidence to support her own political arguments. The key insights that she provides are deeply sociological ones – namely about the social and cultural construction of gender identity and about the need to move beyond the medical model to understand the social causes of mental illness generally and postnatal depression more specifically.

The politics here are gender politics – but Oakley also reflects on the political wrangles between rival professions: the midwife vs the obstetrician; the social worker vs the psychiatrist. Oakley's analysis centres on the need for a social understanding of individual problems. The evidence she uses is therefore often cross-national, anthropological and historical. The logic is that if things can be different elsewhere or at another time then this is proof positive that what we witness around us is not a manifestation of underlying biological fixed traits, but rather a complex interaction between the social and the cultural.

[43] Ann Oakley, 'Occupation Housewife', *New Society* (13 August 1970), p. 282.
[44] Ibid., p. 284.
[45] Ann Oakley, 'What Makes Girls Differ from Boys?', *New Society* (21 December 1978), pp. xii–xiv, 'The Baby Blues', *New Society* (5 April 1979), pp. 11–12, 'The Failure of the Movement for Women's Equality', *New Society* (23 August 1979), pp. 392–94, 'Society at Work: A Poor Birthright', *New Society* (24 July 1980), pp. 172–73 and 'Men and Women: For Love or Money the Unspoken Deal', *New Society* (18/25 December 1980), pp. iv–vi.
[46] Oakley, 'What Makes Girls Differ from Boys?', pp. xii–xiv and 'The Baby Blues', pp. 11–12.

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We can also see a clear development from Oakley's first three pieces for *New Society* in 1970 and 1971 to the series of articles she wrote in the magazine's final years (1987 and 1988). By the late 1980s, Oakley was not only more established in her academic career (at the Institute of Education running the Social Science Research Unit) but had also published her autobiographical *Taking it like a Woman* (1984) and her first work of fiction, *Telling the Truth about Jerusalem* (1986). However, it was not until 1988 that she published her hit novel *The Men's Room*, which was adapted into a popular TV mini-series in 1991.

During this period, Oakley contributed to the regular 'Personal View' page of the magazine. These single-page opinion pieces were provided by a handful of regular contributors, including the architect and educationalist Colin Ward, the feminist historian Sheila Rowbotham and the historian of modern Europe Jonathan Steinberg. Oakley provided a total of eleven 'Personal Views' and what is particularly striking here is the use of personal narrative, which contrasted with the more detached distant formal tone of many of her earlier contributions to the magazine. For example, in her June 1987 piece 'Driven mad by life', Oakley vividly describes meeting a woman in her late twenties on a train journey through the 'sodden and depressed state of the midland landscape' who portrays herself as having problems with alcoholism and mental illness. She uses this encounter as an illustration of the strong links between social deprivation and mental illness.[47]

Of particular interest for this chapter is Oakley's piece 'A Retreat of One's Own', published in December 1987.[48] Here, with a direct allusion to Virginia Woolf's 1929 essay 'A Room of One's Own', she describes in detail her experiences of being assigned a writing studio, located between two laundry rooms and near to the boiler house, when participating in a cultural retreat in Bellagio (funded by the Rockefeller Foundation). Oakley then gives us the brief but evocative sentence 'So I fight to get the words out against the music of domestic technology'. In this 'Personal View' Oakley appears to be struggling with the realisation that she is now part of the 'establishment', commenting: 'never before has so much time and comfort been offered to so few to do, perhaps so little'. However, she is also attuned to the gendered power dynamics of the elite gathering, such that it is she (one of the four female scholars among the total of twelve) who is given the room near the laundry and the wife of the professor of biochemistry who is still 'dutifully typing out his articles'. Oakley concludes her piece by describing her work as 'dubious text,

[47] Ann Oakley, 'Driven Mad by Life', *New Society* (26 June 1987), p. 25.
[48] Ann Oakley. 'A Retreat of One's Own', *New Society* (18 December 1987), p. 47.

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sliding messily out like toothpaste from a badly squeezed tube between two laundry rooms'. This use of domestic simile, bordering on the dysphemistic, to describe her own work displays a tension between two contrasting authorial personas: a self-assured and experienced scholar able to humorously employ her own experiences in writing that reaches a wide audience, and a disempowered and marginalised woman who feels that however hard she strives she and her work will always be consigned to the domestic margins. An interest in the material conditions of writing and the implications of this for different gendered experiences of scholarship also appears as a theme in Oakley's study *Father and Daughter: Patriarchy, Gender and Social Science* (2014). In the third chapter Oakley documents her memories of assisting her father Richard Titmuss by helping him to read the proofs of his academic work. Her diary for 1959, written when she was 15, records that one April Saturday she spent the afternoon 'checking a 12-page lecture with Daddy'. 'In those days, books came out in two sets of proofs: the galleys – long strips of print like academic toilet paper (good for drawing on afterwards) – and page proofs. Both had to be done. He insisted that they had to be read aloud'.[49] Oakley goes on to admit that she was impressed 'not by the substance of his writing but by its textual quality: the long words, the page long paragraphs, the diligent footnotes, the mysterious 'Cmd' (Command) numbers attached to official publications'.[50]

Ray Pahl

Though a less regular contributor to *New Society* than either Hall or Oakley, Ray Pahl was still a frequent presence in its pages between 1964 and 1982 (always preserving his academic nomenclature of R. E. Pahl). During this period, he wrote ten substantial essays for the magazine, one short opinion piece and dozens of book reviews (including eleven reviews in a single year: 1969). Pahl's contributions can be divided into two main types: sociological essays grounded in his current research (often penned when this was still work-in-progress), and more speculative accounts of social trends and their implications for society and public policy. In his early contributions, Pahl appears particularly keen to influence the thinking and practice of urban planners, whereas later he more often presents himself as a wise but world-weary social observer who has lost faith in public policy as a tool for improving people's lives. In turn, this shift in political orientation, which reflects the disillusionment with

[49] Oakley, *Father and Daughter*, p. 28. [50] Ibid., p. 29.

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top-down planning associated with 'Non Plan', sees Pahl change his stance towards sociological 'futurology'. In the 1960s, Pahl regularly positions himself against social scientists' and planners' tendency to focus on identifying long-term social trends instead of analysing immediate social needs (itself an interesting authorial stance given Mike Savage's claims that sociology came to define itself as a science of the future in 1960s Britain).[51] By contrast, from the mid-1970s, Pahl often writes as a futurologist, predicting the likely long-term consequences of current economic and social processes (notably deindustrialisation, state corporatism, worklessness, and the changing gendered division of labour). In many ways, these later essays have aged less well than Pahl's interventions from the 1960s precisely because many (though by no means all) of his predictions for the future, such as ever rising joblessness, have not materialised.

It is tempting to see this shift in approach as one rooted in biography. As a junior academic in the 1960s, Pahl wrote from a relatively marginal position and sought to ground his public interventions in a mix of professional fieldwork and prosaic common sense. In his first essay, drawn from his doctoral research on Hertfordshire commuter villages, Pahl offered a subtle account of social divisions rooted in class and contrasting understandings of 'community' which, he suggested, defied (but also, crucially, did not *need*) resolution.[52] Later in the decade, Pahl wrote two powerful essays critiquing modern planning. In 1968, he had been seconded to the Department of the Environment as an expert adviser, contributing to both the South-East Regional Plan and the Greater London Development Plan, but in his *New Society* essays he wrote as the expert outsider rather than as the frustrated insider he presumably was.[53]

These lively, imaginative pieces both hinge on the central idea that planning had become too remote from place and people, and too obsessed by supposed long-term social trends. Pahl pointed out that despite much talk of the 'mobile society', and planners' obsession with building urban townscapes for the age of the car, most people had limited or no access to private transport (he argued that planners took the middle-class, company man's lifestyle as its model of human destiny). Pahl concluded the first of these essays with the flourishing declaration: 'Mobility is limited by class, career and life cycle characteristics. Mobility

[51] Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940*.
[52] R. E. Pahl, 'The Two Class Village', *New Society* (27 February 1964), pp. 7–9.
[53] Pahl Interview Transcript, 6226int026, p. 188.

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will never destroy the importance of locality' (itself a bold claim about the future, albeit wrapped in sceptical, grounded empiricism).[54]

In the second essay, 'Whose City?' (1969), Pahl made his criticisms of urban planning more explicit, arguing that by spending 'their time worrying about the provision of motorways and yachting marinas in 1991' British planners 'may take attention away from present problems and so, indirectly, help to make them worse'.[55] In all his *New Society* essays from the 1960s, Pahl writes in a clear, jargon-free language that is nonetheless grounded in sociological fieldwork and disciplinary expertise. Crucially, throughout the decade he writes as an outsider to power (despite his growing connections to government), but as an insider to social science as the emerging discipline of social understanding.

By 1971, still only 36, Pahl was professor in sociology at the University of Kent. Even by the standards of a young discipline it was a precocious achievement. Perhaps inevitably, the tone of his journalistic writings began to shift. In 1974 he published two substantial interventions in *New Society*. The first was a largely upbeat state-of-the-field survey of British sociology where he argued that, despite widespread talk about the subject's supposed theoretical and methodological crises, rigorous sociological fieldwork was still flourishing. Pahl's voice was authoritative and reassuring. In fact, Pahl later recalled feeling deeply pessimistic about the state of sociology in the 1970s.[56] In this sense, his writing for *New Society* was performative; Pahl was seeking to shore up his subject and its central claim to be listened to beyond itself. The principal criticism he felt willing to share in print was that British sociology 'lack[ed] a wider intellectual commitment and a concern to communicate outside its boundaries. I consider this curious shyness a weakness.'[57] From Pahl's perspective, not enough of his peers shared his commitment to sociological journalism. The second piece from 1974, co-written with J. T. Winkler, offered a sweeping critique of Britain's inexorable slide into 'corporatism' (a sort of 'fascism with a human face') in response to recent economic shocks which had culminated in 'stagflation' and the 1973 oil crisis.[58] Pahl later recalled ringing editor Paul Barker to pitch the piece and encourage him to run it on the day of the October 1974 General Election (which he

[54] R. E. Pahl, 'Is the Mobile Society a Myth?', *New Society* (11 January 1968), pp. 46–48.
[55] R. E. Pahl, 'Whose City?', *New Society* (23 January 1969), pp. 120–22; reproduced in R. E. Pahl, *Whose City? And Other Essays on Sociology and Planning* (Harlow: Longmans, 1970).
[56] Thompson, *Pioneers*, Ray Pahl Interview Transcript, 6226int026, p. 76, 78.
[57] R. E. Pahl, 'Sociology's Conflicting Tradition', *New Society* (30 May 1974), pp. 504–6.
[58] R. E. Pahl and J. T. Winkler, 'The Coming Corporatism', *New Society* (10 October 1974), pp. 72–76.

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did).[59] Thatcher and the New Right's determination to reassert market liberalism meant that many of the essay's predictions enjoyed only a short shelf-life, but it was nonetheless an influential essay that was widely reproduced and debated.[60]

Pahl wrote five more pieces for *New Society* between 1978 and 1982. Covering a range of topics from inner city renewal, through adolescents' imagined futures to the meaning of 'work' in a deindustrialised society, each engages with what Pahl envisaged would be the coming collapse of full-time paid employment in a post-industrial economy. Mixing material from his own research with insights drawn from academic social science, Pahl encouraged the readers of *New Society* to grapple with the likely consequences of the continued unwinding of the post-war social settlement. Although his writing is often deeply pessimistic, it is also infused with a strong idealistic, even utopian, streak about the possibility that machines might yet liberate people from the indignities of wage labour. In contrast to his earlier writing, these essays are all about anticipating the future and using social science to suggest how society might best adapt to its challenges. In 1980, writing with Jay Gershuny, Pahl speculated on different possible post-work futures facing Britain, concluding that 'If we are to cope with a world in which jobs are lost inside the formal economy, we must come to understand the nature of work outside it.'[61]

In contrast to his academic writing, Pahl seems to have used *New Society* to experiment with speculative, sometimes radical, ideas about how social life might be different. His later essays for the magazine float many of the ideas, such as 'polarisation' and the changing gendered division of labour, that would form the intellectual bedrock of his classic 1984 study *Divisions of Labour*, but here freed from the constraints of careful, fully evidenced academic writing. At times this could lead Pahl to make strikingly bold, even wild, predictions. In his final essay for *New Society* in October 1982, Pahl playfully acknowledged that it was 'flattering to be a soothsayer for the day', before predicting that unemployment would likely continue to rise, 'electronic consumerism' had run its course, and, most contentiously, that 'increasing gender-based conflict seems inevitable – both in the household and also, perhaps, in trade

[59] Thompson, *Pioneers*, Ray Pahl Interview Transcript, 6226int026, pp. 76–77.
[60] R. E. Pahl and J. T. Winkler, 'The Coming Corporatism', *Challenge*, 18:1 (1975), pp. 28–35.
[61] J. L. Gershuny and R. E. Pahl, 'Britain in the Decade of the Three Economies', *New Society* (3 January 1980), pp. 7–9.

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unions and political parties'.[62] It was a striking example of how an academic social scientist could adopt a different, more provocative and speculative style when writing for the general public. The article's punchy impact was complemented by humorous illustrations, including a cartoon strip by *The Guardian*'s Steve Bell.

Conclusion

In 1988, under the editorship of Steve Platt, *New Society* merged with the *New Statesman*. The amalgamated journal briefly signalled its dual parentage by adopting the name *New Statesman and Society,* before reverting to the *New Statesman* in 1996. In 1988 the journalist and activist Anthony Barnett reflected in the first edition of the recently merged publication about the cultural and intellectual legacies of its parent journals. The *New Statesman*'s declining circulation and relevance since the mid-1960s, he suggested, was a product of the paper's alienation from the real world, and echoed the broader collapse of Labour politics since the first Wilson government. *New Society*, on the other hand, provided an 'intellectual role for the responsible, concerned outsider' but still 'belonged to the real world'.[63]

This chapter has examined how social scientists have conceptualised writing politically for a wider public, before focussing more specifically on how two sociologists – Ann Oakley and Ray Pahl – and one urbanist and geographer – Peter Hall – used *New Society* to achieve this. Using the 'Pioneers of Social Research' interview data we have explored these social theorists' reflections upon the ways that this publication provided a venue to communicate both within and beyond the boundaries of their own disciplines. While *New Society* was conceived in the 1960s as a venue for the popularisation of social science, its contributors seized on the freedom of writing for a non-specialist audience to practice political writing that illuminated human experience, the limits of planning, and the real-world implications of public and social policy. *New Society* provided a forum for social scientists to try their hand at journalistic writing, to 'speak for the people' by giving voice to the subjects of social research often obscured in more academic analysis, and (particularly in Oakley's case), deploy imaginative prose or even quasi-fictionalised portraits to bring research findings to life. And for all the researchers examined in this paper, *New Society* served, finally, as a crucial site for

[62] R. E. Pahl, 'The Pockmarked Road to a Private Life', *New Society* (7 October 1982), pp. 12–14.
[63] Anthony Barnett, 'A New Politics', *New Statesman and Society* (17 June 1988), p. 18.

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developing networks within their own disciplines, across the social sciences, and with a far wider swath of the British intellectual, cultural, journalistic and political community. Despite the proliferation of many powerful new ways for social scientists to speak directly to the public since the magazine's closure in 1988, it is not clear that an adequate replacement to *New Society* has been found.

The content of Hall, Oakley and Pahl's voluminous writings for *New Society* highlights how 'doing journalism' provided not just a means to reach a wider public, but a mechanism for social scientists to challenge the intellectual norms and practices of their own disciplines, and the social and political institutions with which they were intertwined in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. For all three figures profiled in this chapter, the boundaries between popular writing and academic prose were blurred. Through vivid, digressive, and often funny 'academic polemic', Hall used his prolific reviews and features in *New Society* to critique the norms of the British planning apparatus, and to speculate widely on the current and future development of British society as the planning frameworks of post-war growth and suburban expansion were disrupted by new narratives of decline. Oakley's publications conveyed the importance of gender politics to the social services, and often used personal narrative or semi-fictionalised accounts to illustrate gendered inequalities and social dynamics. And Pahl's accounts conveyed his frustration (shared with Hall) with planners' remoteness from the people and communities they were meant to serve, and challenged dehumanising aspects of both the academic social sciences and the policy making institutions they informed. These three social researchers' reflections on their writing practice, and record of 'speaking for the people', frustrate neat distinctions between instrumental and conceptual research impact and suggest that British social science has long been written for political influence.

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